



Breaking Down the Islamic Republic

March 20, 2026

Featuring Mark Dubowitz

Hosted by Clifford D. May

MAY: Mark Dubowitz and I have worked together here at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies for more than 20 years. In the early days, just after the attacks of September 11th, 2001, we were most focused on Al-Qaeda and other non-state actors. But early on, Mark was seized by the most important nation state sponsor of terrorism, the regime in Tehran that was vowing death to Israel and death to America, waging a gray zone war on what it called then, as it does now, “the Great Satan” and “the Little Satan.” Too many people still to this day don't understand what that means. So, I'll translate. The Islamic Republic of Iran was the first modern nation state openly committed to Jihad against the West. Today – we're recording on Thursday, March 19th – is the one-year anniversary of Mark's *Iran Breakdown* podcast, the best place you can go to understand the great nation of Iran and the tyrannical regime that has done such damage both at home and abroad over the past 47 years.

Mark or “Dubo,” as we often call him, is with us at FDD HQ today. I'm Cliff May, and I'm pleased you're with us too, here on *Foreign Podicy*. Good to see you, old man.

DUBOWITZ: Well, thank you, Cliff. Yeah, no, no. After 22 years of working on Iran, I'm definitely an old man. I've certainly aged.

MAY: Well, I beat you on that one by a generation almost. But anyhow, listen, we'll start with this. How in your view goes the – let's call it the intense kinetic operations. And now that we're in, what, the third week, I guess.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. Listen, I mean, I think it's – from a military perspective, I think it's going extraordinary well. I think it's going better than I would've expected, and it's certainly going better than many people in Washington had assessed over years of war gaming at the Pentagon and within the administration and in outside think tanks. I mean, part of some of those war games, and I think all of the kind of parade of horrors that people had planned out or anticipated in those war games, much of that hasn't happened. Some of it has happened, and we can talk about Hormuz and some other contingencies. But from a military perspective, I think the combination of the United States and Israel, really flying peer-to-peer and working peer-to-peer. I mean, I don't think, Cliff, we've ever in a modern American history –

MAY: Or ancient history.

DUBOWITZ: Or maybe even ancient history. But in American history, gone to war where we are in combat with an ally who's capable of operating at peer with the United States military. And I think that's what's happened with Israel. So, the combined forces of the United States Air Force and the Israeli Air Force, the intelligence communities, and certainly the US Navy have done massive damage to the war making capability of the regime and also to the repression apparatus.

MAY: You know, you've talked about this and written about this quite a bit. I just want to elaborate for a second. When we talk about them working together, what we have never seen before – we have American pilots and Israeli pilots, both in F-35s. They have them speaking in English to each other, coordinating, talking about which targets to take. I mean, when you talk about a model ally, you're talking an ally who not only is willing to defend himself, but can work with you, contribute to the collective defense, and does so. And suddenly they're not just a force multiplier, they're part of your force. That's what's different. I mean, yes, we work with the British, and I don't know how many – I don't know actually how many other nations contributed to the invasion of Normandy. I should know that, but I don't. But this is something –

DUBOWITZ: Canada.

MAY: Canada. OK, God bless Canada then.

DUBOWITZ: Canadians had quite an army in World War II. I think when they finished World War II, they had the fifth largest army in the world.



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MAY: Really?

DUBOWITZ: And then they just proceeded over decades to effectively destroy it.

MAY: Wow.

DUBOWITZ: But no, the Canadians fought very bravely. The Kiwis were with us.

MAY: Right. In Normandy?

DUBOWITZ: In Normandy, but look, at the end of the day, it was a US-UK operation. We were the senior partner; the Brits were the junior partner.

But you're right, we've never had a situation where we have an ally – and it's also worth remembering, Cliff, this is a country of 10 million people with actually a small Air Force and a small intelligence community. It's quite extraordinary when you think about our European NATO allies and put the Turks aside. But I mean, this is the European continent with, I don't know, 350, 400 million people. It's 40 times the size of Israel in terms of population and obviously massive size differential in terms of geography. And yet, is there one European ally not only standing with us today, in terms of political will, but in terms of capability. Could they stand with us? And I think probably the only European ally today that actually has the ability and the will to fight is ironically Ukraine.

MAY: Right. Absolutely right. And of course, the Israelis are also fighting Hezbollah, which is a sort of expeditionary force or army of the Islamic Republic in Lebanon that keeps Lebanon from being a free and independent nation, as well as killed a lot of Americans, and they're fighting them simultaneously. I just point that out. I mean, that's a lot of balls to keep up in the air.

DUBOWITZ: No, I mean, it's extraordinary what the Israelis are doing. I mean, they've obviously fought a multi-front war since October 7th. But the two major fronts today are the Iranian front and the Lebanese front. And yeah, I mean, it's worth remembering. I mean, how many Hezbollah terrorists who are on the State Department list with rewards of five, 10, 15, \$20 million on their heads for killing Americans have the Israelis actually eliminated on our behalf?

MAY: Something else that occurs to me from what you just said. Terrible conflict we've had starting on October 7th, no question about it. If that conflict hadn't begun and Hezbollah had continued to build up – they had something like 150,000 missiles at that point. And the Islamic Republic Iran had continued as it was building its missile arsenal way beyond where it is today – where it would've been – continued building up its nuclear weapons potentials on underground in Fordow. I mean, to give the devil his due, people say – we may get to this a little more – “Look how resilient the regime is. They've been decapitated, they've been hit thousands of times, and they're not giving in.” Imagine what if there had been no war starting a couple of years ago? This regime had continued to build, build, build, build – what kind of war we would be seeing right now.

I'll just make one more point, then I'm sure you have things you want to say. We taught people say, oddly, I think, “This is a war of choice, not a war of necessity.” If you don't fight a war of choice, then you have to fight a war of necessity. A war of choice you're more likely to win than a war of necessity. And isn't our goal to win? This is not an Olympic competition. It's not a sport where, “Oh, let's make sure it's fair to the other side.” As our colleague, Brad Bowman says, “I never want Americans to be in a fair fight ever.”

DUBOWITZ: I think the most important dates, Cliff, as we think about this beyond October 7th, in really providing context to what could have been. Number one, May 2018, President Trump withdraws from the Obama nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the JCPOA.



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MAY: FDD, and particularly you, pushed really hard for that.

DUBOWITZ: Well, we certainly fought against the JCPOA in 2015 and the reason...

MAY: But tell people why. Because I'm still getting on Twitter people saying, "The JCPOA would've prevented this regime from getting nuclear weapons and you guys threw it away." It was a diplomatic solution.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. So, the reason that it was so fatally flawed is that the agreement, number one, would've provided Iran with, we estimated, about a trillion dollars' worth of sanctions relief. They obviously would've taken that money, and they took some of that money, but they never got all of it because President Trump withdrew from the agreement to build up their war making capabilities.

MAY: And their proxies like Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Houthis.

(CROSSTALK)

DUBOWITZ: Sure. I include all of that as part of their war making capabilities.

MAY: Just be clear.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. Yeah. Missiles, drones, terror proxies, their Navy – they would've used that money to buy advanced weaponry from the Chinese and Russians – fighter jets, attack helicopters, submarines. So over the course of the JCPOA with that kind of money, they would've built up a formidable military and had sufficient resources to fund their terror proxies.

Number two is the agreement contained certain restrictions on Iran's ability to expand its nuclear program, but those restrictions would expire or sunset over time. In fact, they would begin to sunset starting a couple years ago. The ballistic missile UN embargo got lifted, the arms embargo got lifted. I mean, these were UN Security Council resolutions that under the JCPOA get lifted. So, this allows Iran to buy ballistic missiles and weapons free of UN restrictions. The nuclear restrictions sunset.

And so, that allows Iran by 2030, which is a few years away from today, to actually emerge with an industrial size enrichment capability with near zero nuclear breakout, with multiple enrichment facilities buried under mountains with advanced centrifuges that spin much faster than first generation centrifuges, and therefore you need fewer centrifuges. So, as a result, they are easier to hide, and you now have the capability to add near zero nuclear breakout to break out nuclear weapons. And by the way, under the JCPOA, all of that expansion of their capability would've been legal under the deal. There was nothing restricting them after 2030 from actually enriching to any level, nothing in the agreements that you couldn't enrich 20 percent, 60 percent, even 90 percent. As long as you didn't develop nuclear weapons, you were able to build out this massive capability. So, what they effectively had were patient pathways to nuclear weapons, a trillion dollars in sanctions relief to fortify their economy and to fund their external aggression and to build up an even more repressive apparatus to control their people.



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This would've all happened under the Obama deal. So, May 2018, Donald Trump does something very important. He withdraws from the agreement. He puts all the sanctions back and he begins a campaign of what became known as maximum pressure. And then fast forward January 2020, the next important date, Donald Trump kills Qasem Soleimani. Qasem Soleimani, head of the IRGC Quds Force, the most famous and competent and strategic and deadly battlefield commander that Iran has ever had. He was responsible for building up this network of terror proxies, this so-called "Axis of Resistance," or what we call on *The Iran Breakdown*, the Axis of Misery. But he was really the one who built up Hezbollah and Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Shiite militias in Iraq and the Houthis into this formidable terror army. Well, Trump takes him out. No other US president was ever prepared to do that.

Some presidents had the opportunity, and they decided not to because they were warned that if they did, this would trigger World War III with Iran. Trump takes out Qasem Soleimani. The regime doesn't even react because they are so shocked. They lob a few missiles, they give us a warning, and now you've taken off their most important battlefield commander. And then fast forward to October 7th, the Israelis in a sense – and it's kind of gruesome to say, but they got lucky. Why did they get lucky? They got lucky because Hamas decides to jump the gun.

MAY: I always use that exact phrase. Yaya Sinwar decides, from an Iranian point of view, jump the gun. And just back up for one second, if the JCPOA had been left and Qasem Soleimani had been left in place to continue, think how strong the regime would have been at right now. I mean, it might have been ≠ especially if you understand that the regime is in, what we call an axis, with the strongest communist party in history in Beijing, with the neo-imperialists in Moscow, and with a regime in North Korea – that by the way, with diplomatic solutions all failed so they have nuclear weapons.

(CROSSTALK)

DUBOWITZ: And ICBMs aimed in America.

MAY: And ICBMs. Right. I mean, just imagine if those four said to us all at one point right now – because none of this had happened, "You understand we have a lot of nuclear weapons, the four of us. You understand that there are things you will need to do because you don't have the missile defense system you need. We can take out a half dozen cities. You want us to try, or you want to capitulate? And by the way, the price of gas could go up to \$5, you don't want that."

DUBOWITZ: Right.

MAY: I'm joking.

DUBOWITZ: So, if on October 7th...

MAY: Right.

DUBOWITZ: ...it had been a coordinated invasion of Israel.

MAY: Right. Right, right, right.

DUBOWITZ: If Sinwar hadn't jumped the gun...

MAY: Right.



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DUBOWITZ: ...but it had been coordinated with Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Shiite militias, the Houthis, and the Iranians invading and raining missiles and drones on Israel. There is probably a pretty good chance Israel would've been eliminated. And as you say, Iran would've been much stronger. It would've had hundreds of billions of dollars in the sanctions relief it would've pocketed from the JCPOA. It would've had the opportunity to build up this nuclear infrastructure. And so, it is 2018, 2020, 2023 that are in very important years in the setbacks that we have delivered to the Islamic Republic. And then you get into 2024 when in April and October of that year, the Islamic Republic fires ballistic missiles and drones at Israel.

MAY: From its own soil.

DUBOWITZ: From its own soil. For the first time. Often – always use its proxies for the first time it decides to directly attack Israel from its own soil. The Israeli Air Force responds, and the response under Biden has to be limited because President Biden is not willing to give the Israelis the green light to really attack Iran in any kind of fundamental way. But what the Israelis do is they attack the air defense systems of the Islamic Republic, and they demonstrate to the United States that they can take out these sophisticated Russian air defenses. So, 2024 is a wake-up call. “Well, wait a second, maybe the Islamic Republic is not 10 feet tall, and maybe these air defenses are not going to protect them.” And then that sets the stage for the 12-Day War last year in June 2025, another exchange, and now the Israelis go.

And what do the Israelis demonstrate to America in the first 11 days after eliminating their air defenses, bombing key nuclear sites, taking out key leadership – a preview of what we're seeing today? They demonstrate to the United States of America, “We've gone in. It's our pilots that have taken the risks. The sky is clear for you.” And then President Trump makes a fateful decision, and I would think superb decision, and he sends in B2 bombers, and he drops massive ordinance penetrators. And we fire Tomahawk missiles and we do severe damage to key Iranian nuclear sites, including the Fordow facility, deeply buried underground – an enrichment facility where the Iranians could weaponize Uranium. And President Trump is – he is vindicated. He is proven right against a foreign policy and defense establishment that you can take on the Islamic Republic of Iran as the United States with your peer ally Israel, and you can do severe damage to them.

But he ends that war in 12 days. He goes to diplomacy and he says to the Iranians, “OK, let's negotiate. Here are my demands: You should not have a nuclear program. You should not have enrichment. You should not have reprocessing. You should not have the key tools you need to develop nuclear weapons, but you should have civilian energy. You can be like 22 other countries. You can buy your fuel rods from abroad. You can stick them in your reactors. You can power your electrical grids, but we're not going to give you enrichment because we know from the past that your goal is to turn that enriched material into weapons grade. You've gone to 60 percent. You're the only country ever to go to 60 percent that didn't develop nuclear weapons, and you're 97 percent of the way there to having what you need to develop nuclear weapons by having 60 percent enriched uranium.

“So, we're not going to let you have enrichment. You agree to that? We can do a deal. And by the way, I don't even need a deal on missiles or your terror proxies. I just need a deal on enrichment. And then we can Make Iran Great Again. I'll lift the sanctions and you'll have hundreds of billions of dollars that Obama had promised you and I had stopped because I withdrew from the agreement.” And what does Iran say? “No.” And they continue to try reconstitute their nuclear program and their missile program and continue to fund these terror proxies that had been so severely degraded by the Israelis. And with that in mind, President Trump says, “OK, that's it. I've given diplomacy a chance. We've exhausted that option,” and he launches Operation Epic Fury.



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MAY: And I suspect that he believed after the 12-Day War, the Iranians would say – because it's logical by the way we think, “OK, we got kicked around pretty good on this one. We thought we had missile defense and it didn't work and they've destroyed a lot of things and we're just going to have to make some compromises here. We just have to.” And they didn't and in a way they couldn't because they have not an ideology, but a theology – a Khomeini theology – and there's just no way they can even appear to bend the knee to the infidel, to the Great Satan.

DUBOWITZ: Well, that's right.

MAY: I mean, but it takes some imagination or some traveling to see that these people are – I'm talking about – I'm not talking about average Iranian. I'm talking about the regime. They have a mentality that's profoundly different from ours. We get kicked around, we may say, “You know what, that's enough.” Right? They're not going to say that.

DUBOWITZ: Well, I mean, listen, the smart play for the late Khamenei – Ayatollah Khamenei – it's amazing after 20 years working on this issue, to imagine he is now the late Ayatollah Khamenei – would have been to say, “All right, President Trump, I got you. I'm doing a deal.”

MAY: Right.

DUBOWITZ: “And here's the deal. We'll give up our enrichment capabilities, and we'll give up our reprocessing capabilities, and give you our centrifuges, and you will lift all the sanctions, and we will get hundreds of billions of dollars.” And then in his own mind, Trump's gone at that point in two and a half years. There's a new president in the White House in 2029. Chances are – unless it's maybe Marco Rubio – next president on the Republican side or on the Democratic side is not going to be as focused as President Trump on the Iran issue and is not going to be prepared to use American power in the way President Trump has used to deal with this issue. And then you're a way to the races. And now if you're Khamenei or a successor, you rebuild your enrichment capability, you've pocketed all that money, and now you start to rebuild your Axis of Misery.

You start to fund your terror proxies. “And America can't do a damn thing about it,” as the late Ayatollah Khomeini said back in 1979, 1980.

MAY: Right.

DUBOWITZ: That would've been the smart play. Why didn't they take the smart play? I think you've got to put your finger on it, which is it is impossible for Khamenei at the time to imagine that level of compromise, or in his mind, humiliation. And as a result, defiance for Khamenei was always going to be not the rational choice but was the logical choice. Because based on his set of logical assumptions, Khamenei's resistance approach was going to be fully consistent with Khomeini and the Islamic Republic and everything that they had built and their entire self-perception as well as their entire strategic doctrine. And he badly miscalculated.



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MAY: And, you know, I might have said, or somebody might have concluded, "OK, I understand he's 86 years old at that point. He's an old man in a hurry. He wants to see certain things happen while he's alive, he can't possibly give in." But then after he's dead, essentially – correct me if I'm wrong – Ali Larijani is the top – is the bull goose in Iran, if you look (inaudible) expression. And he's a younger man and he's a smart guy. Everybody says, a lot of people are saying, "Oh, he was so pragmatic." I don't know if he was so pragmatic. "Oh, he was so cultured." Well, he killed thousands of his own people. That's not so cultured. You know, he hangs gay people. That's usually not something that the left approves of, but in this case, they give him a pass. But he doesn't say, "OK, now that I'm in charge, I'm going to do exactly what you said," which would be the smart thing to do. "I'll cut a deal with Trump and let's see what happens in three years," because I don't remember how old Ali Larijani is, but he's not that old. "And then we'll be back in the saddle and off to the races again." But he doesn't.

DUBOWITZ: No, because I think at the end of the day, that Washington has been under a delusion for decades...

MAY: There you go.

DUBOWITZ: ...as they search for the elusive Iranian moderate inside the Islamic Republic. And so, there is really no difference fundamentally between Khamenei and Larijani. There's no difference ideologically, theologically. They are men that have bought into the idea that the Islamic Republic was founded upon the idea of resistance and that its goal is to eliminate Israel; and its goal is to drive the United States out of the Middle East; and its goal is to sew terror and chaos and bloodshed in the Middle East in order to advance the goals of the Islamic Republic. So, if you are Larijani – even if Khamenei is not there – you are not going to compromise. I mean, the only way you compromise – I mean, in 2015, Khamenei compromised with Obama, but the only way you compromised is you do the JCPOA. Because from Kamine's perspective, he wasn't giving in anything.

MAY: No.

DUBOWITZ: He was getting the possibility of sanctions lifted, hundreds of billions of dollars into his coffers that help him build up exactly the capabilities that he needed in terms of missiles and drones and terror and nuclear. And all he had to do was be a patient man and he would wait and the restrictions would go away. And now he'd have near zero nuclear breakout enrichment capability. That's not a compromise. That's just smart strategy. "I'll be patient. I'm not going on a straight line, but I will zig and I will zag my way to nuclear weapons and to the resources that I need in order to both sustain the Islamic Republic and ensure that I can finance its regional and global ambitions." So Larijani would've taken us in exactly the same direction that Khamenei took us and whoever takes over from Larijani, now that he's been eliminated, will take us in that direction.

And now that Mojtaba Khamenei is supposedly the successor or supreme leader, assuming he's still alive or capable of exercising his duties, he too will take us in that direction. The goal – and I think we should get to this in the conversation, Cliff – is we have to do a number of things. The first thing is we have to destroy the war making capabilities of the Islamic Republic. We have to do severe damage to the repression apparatus of the Islamic Republic. At some point, we are going to conclude major military operations because they will not and should not go on indefinitely. And then the question is, as we move to the next phase is, have we done sufficient damage to the Repression apparatus so that when Iranians take the streets back – and they will, because Iranians have been on the streets repeatedly since the late 1990s and they're coming back.



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They're not there now. I mean, everybody's saying, "Well, where are Iranians? Why aren't they in the streets?" Well, they're not there now. Bombs are dropping. They're not going to take to the streets now. They're waiting to see how much damage we and the Israelis can do to the repression apparatus, and then the calculation will be as follows. What is the change in the repressive capabilities of the regime compared to what they were in January when the regime massacred 30,000 Iranians? And what is the enhancement in the capabilities of the opposition who are on the streets in January unarmed and with very little support from the United States or others? Can we change that calculation? Can we diminish the repressive capabilities of the regime? Can we enhance the opposition capabilities so that when the two meet again, the regime is weaker and the opposition is stronger?

And if that's the case, can Iranians take back their country? As President Trump said, they have a once in a lifetime opportunity to take back their country and hopefully have a free and stable and prosperous Iran.

MAY: Got it. Now, you put a piece out just today titled, "Operation Roaring Lion Is Rewriting [the] Rules of War Against Iran," and made some interesting points. But I want to – before I ask you to talk a little bit about that, I want to talk about some of the, at least one of the naysayers. And the naysayer I have in mind is somebody you and I know – not only do I know him, he introduced us. And I'm not saying anything bad about Bill Crystal – brilliant guy – but we no longer agree on a lot of things. And so, he says in a piece today, "If some courageous truth teller were to enter the Oval Office this morning and speak, he'd say, 'It ain't going great, sir. In fact, sir, it's going pretty badly.'" And a hat tip to Brit Hume, because he said something about this. He said, "Can you imagine if the Tehran regime had, at this point, eliminated the US president, the US vice president, the speaker of the house, sunk our Navy, and destroyed our Air Force, that any commentator would say, 'Not going so well for the Mullahs.'"

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. Look, and the Israelis use the analogy; if they had taken out the Prime Minister of Israel, the IDF chief of staff, the head of military intelligence, the head of Mossad, and they also had destroyed the three major Israeli defense contractors, and essentially destroyed the Israeli Air Force and taken on the Air Force commander, and taken on the Naval commander, and sunk Israel's Navy and submarines, and Israel's defense industrial base was destroyed. How are things going? I mean, that's the elimination of Israel, right?

MAY: Yeah, right.

DUBOWITZ: So, I think that – I mean, I don't know if Bill said anything else to back up that argument, but – and listen, I think Bill – he comes at this as he was a very strong advocate for the war in Iraq and obviously it didn't go as Bill had predicted. So, he comes with a certain amount of understandable caution.

But I also think, Cliff, there's something else at work here, and I think this is really worth touching on. I believe that Trump derangement syndrome and Bibi derangement syndrome is impacting people's analytical capabilities. I think that the hatred that many people have for Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu – and we can discuss this and why, and all the reasons. And some of it's understandable, and some of it's overwrought. I think what happens is because of the disdain that people like Bill and others feel for these leaders, their ability to assess the actual military successes has been distorted. I think there's no doubt – I think there's overwhelming evidence of military successes in the first three weeks. Now, there's still things to do, and let's talk about those things.

MAY: Well...

DUBOWITZ: Alright? There's Hormuz.

MAY: I want to get to...

DUBOWITZ: There's existing nuclear sites.



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MAY: Yeah, OK.

DUBOWITZ: There's so much more that needs to get done in order to declare this a military victory. But the way I like to think about this so that I don't get caught up in this world of derangement is I think of myself as sitting in a room with the men that are actually leading this campaign. And sitting around the table would be General [Dan] Caine, who is the chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff; Admiral Bradley Cooper, who is the CENTCOM commander; John Ratcliffe, who is the CIA director; and next to them would be men in uniform and intelligence officials. And these are the people that are actually day in and day out thinking about and running America's military and intelligence campaign. And then on the other side of the table would be David Barnea, who's the head of Mossad; Shlomi Binder, who's the head of Aman, Israel's military intelligence; Tomer Bar, who's the head of the Israeli Air Force; their commander, IDF Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir; and a group of serious military and intelligence professionals who are running the war on the Israeli side.

So, I exclude Trump and Bibi from the room, and I think about who are the military and intelligence commanders running the first phase of the war. Now, one cannot push aside the commander-in-chief and one cannot push aside the prime minister. Clearly, they're making key decisions. But in terms of the actual military phase of this, I focus on those men and their competencies, their track record, their professionalism, and all of them in their own right have got incredible track records of success, including against the Iranians. So, that's how I step away from Bibi and Trump derangement syndrome. And unlike some of our friends, are able to – look, I think, dispassionately and objectively at what is the US and Israeli military and intelligence accomplishments in the first three weeks? And Cliff, I think they're impressive, but let's talk about what's left to do.

MAY: Well, exactly. So, Admiral Mark Montgomery, our great colleague here – he has not been in today – Thursday's *New York Times*. Very much I think along the lines of my column on *The Washington Times* posted Tuesday night and the Wednesday paper. Basically, saying that the conflict cannot end with this regime saying, "You see we survived and the most important energy choke point in the world is ours, Strait of Hormuz." Cannot – and this is something I think is an important subsidiary point, but important. The Strait of Hormuz is an international waterway. No regime or government in Tehran has a right to claim it as its own. And to do so, and for other nations to say, "Oh, well, what can we do?" Don't tell me you care about international law then, because freedom of navigation is a fundamental international law, based on – basically the most basic international law, freedom of the seas, which goes back to the 17th century. The idea that there are commons and we all should respect them.

That goes back – but no international law means anything if it's not enforced. And if the US doesn't enforce it, nobody does. And then there is no international law. So, the Houthis can take over the Bab-el-Mandeb, which is maybe the second most important energy choke point in the world, and they would. And then they control the economy. They have nuclear weapons. Again, America, it will never be great again. It'll be a second – it'll be a over the hill power. And Xi Jinping will have what he wants, which is to replace the US as the preeminent power in the world with his junior partners at his side. But let me say this, I think Admiral Montgomery – Monty, as we call him – makes very clear, it's not easy to secure the Strait of Hormuz. It doesn't say it's not doable, but it's obviously easier to throw down a mine than to clear a mine.



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And we have to get rid of all the ways that they can attack you. Again, they're not building anything. They're just attacking – or not even attacking, actually – threatening to attack so there's no insurance, so the boats don't go through, right? That's basically what they're doing. And Aaron MacLean has talked about this well as well. He's affiliated with us, and others now – with CBS and has the *School of War* podcast, which is great. But there are phases you have to go through because basically you've got to eliminate the threats coming from the shore, coming from boats, coming from drones – very difficult to do. We haven't done nearly enough in the US in terms of drone warfare. I think people thought, "Oh, that's not for us. That's for others." No, it's for us now too. That's another place, as you pointed out, where the Ukrainians said, "Hey, we can help because we know a lot about this. We know more than anybody else about fighting drone warfare."

Keep in mind, the Iranian regime provided drones and even the ability for a drone factory to the Russians to help kill Ukrainians, which should, you would think, galvanize some Europeans. Hasn't, but we'll get to look at that.

DUBOWITZ: Well, I should also galvanize, to be fair. I mean, I'm just, as I say, strictly nonpartisan. It should also galvanize people in Washington on the right, including in the Trump administration. I mean, I think the most courageous and the most important European ally that has stepped forward in the past three weeks has been Zelenskyy and Ukraine.

MAY: Yeah, absolutely.

DUBOWITZ: But bringing both rhetorical and moral support to the United States against the Islamic Republic of Iran. But also, as you say, offering capabilities, anti-drone capabilities to us and to our Gulf allies that are going to be very, very important in being able to defeat Iranian drone warfare, are going to be very important in opening up the straits and maintaining the straight as a free and open passage going forward for weeks, months, and years.

MAY: Yeah. I think Ukraine should be recognized for what it is, which is a model ally like Israel. And would you rather fight with Ukraine on your side or the Spanish under the current socialist workers –government who don't even want to be in NATO anymore and won't spend for it and quite a few others? I'll just give you one quote from Admiral Montgomery's piece and people should read it, but if they haven't, "If the United States can hold firm for the next few weeks,' Admiral Montgomery says, 'It can fully degrade Iran's war making apparatus. This would usher in a multi-year interval of calm of the kind that neither sanctions nor diplomacy has been able to produce in four decades.'" And you and I know Monty well. When he talks about "usher in a multi-year calm" – because he knows that these guys will always try to come back.

Because you want to talk about a long war? The Jihad started 1400 years ago. Not everyone's going to fight it. I don't think the Saudis won. I don't think want to fight it anymore. I don't think the Emirates – but there will be people who want to fight this war. But what he says, it strikes me as exactly right on.

DUBOWITZ: Well, you mentioned the Saudis and Emirates, and I actually just want to take a slight detour from Hormuz, but then it relates back to Hormuz. And that is – what is extraordinary is the extent to which I think the Islamic Republic miscalculated when they decided to retaliate ferociously against the Gulf. I mean, the country that has sustained the highest number of Iranian strikes – missile and drone strikes in the past three weeks has not been Israel, though Iran has tried. It's actually been the UAE. Over 2,000 drones and missiles have been fired at the tiny Emirates, who've done a really remarkable job of defending against that using air defense systems provided by the United States and Israel. And the Emirates, I think, without going into the detail right now, I think when the story is written about this war, I think people will learn things about the Emirates that will surprise people in a very positive way.

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And the other thing I think is just worth noting is even countries that are problematic for the United States like Qatar, after the Iranians attacked Qatar and have gone now after their shared natural gas field, even Qatar has started to change their tune. They've been long an Iranian ally. They've been long a huge problem for the United States and for Israel and for the West and dealing with the Islamic Republic. But I just noted the other day there was actually a really good op-ed in *Al Jazeera*, making the case for why the United States and Israel are winning and why President Trump must see this through. Now –

MAY: It's much more positive than what's in much of the mainstream media here in the US on this effort.

DUBOWITZ: Well, I chuckle because you mentioned this *Atlantic* piece that Rich Goldberg and I wrote, which we wrote for *The Atlantic*, which tends to be a place where a lot of voices are very skeptical of this war. But I noted – I thought, “Oh, that was so much smarter that he wrote it for *Al Jazeera*.” Now, *Al Jazeera* would never run a piece like that unless the family that rules Qatar, the al-Thani family, hadn't picked up the phone and called the managing editor of *Al Jazeera* and said, “By the way, I know we've told you all these years to bash Israel and bash America and support the Islamic Republic of Iran. We've made an editorial decision, change it 180.” And literally on its head overnight, *Al Jazeera* started putting out news and op-eds hammering the Islamic Republic and supporting the United States and Israel. So even Qatar, which is kind of on the – as one of these outliers in the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] is being very close to Iran, has begun to shift its position.

The UAE, the Saudis, the Kuwaitis, even though Omanis who are always playing both sides – I think the GCC was furious when the Iranians started attacking them. You saw that in a unified GCC condemnation. By the way, Cliff, I mean, we talk about America being isolated, Israel being isolated in this war. At the United Nations, there was a resolution sponsored by Bahrain – which also, by the way, I should have mentioned as a country that has been attacked by Iran and has condemned the Islamic Republic. They introduced a resolution. It got the largest support, the biggest support in UN history. I mean, I think it was something over 150 countries that co-sponsored it and supported it, condemning the Islamic Republic of Iran for attacking the Gulf and for its many nefarious acts. So remarkable piece, by the way, of diplomacy by our friend Mike Waltz, who used to work here at FDD and is now the ambassador to the United Nations. But getting that resolution, condemning the Islamic Republic is very important.

OK. How does this all relate to Hormuz? Well, at the end of the day, we're going to need a coalition to keep Hormuz open. And at the core of that coalition is us, United States, and our capabilities. And there are going to be countries that can bring just a flag. All they'll do is bring a flag and say, “Yeah, we're with you,” and there's nothing else they can do for us. And there'll be other countries who can bring more than a flag and actually can bring mine sweeping capabilities and provide intelligence and can be – provide naval warships and can do more. At the end of the day, we'll be leading that effort, but it's very important that we have this broader coalition that basically says to the Islamic Republic of Iran, “You are alone. You are isolated.” And the world has come together to take back Hormuz and to maintain Hormuz for the free flow of oil for the international economy.

I think we're seeing that coalition emerge in real time. We just today...

MAY: I was going to – because this morning it looked bad. I had question for you. Boy, are allies doing badly. But in the afternoon, it's already changed. I think there's, what, seven nations that are saying, “We'll be part of this coalition”? Is that what – you're probably more up on it than I am.



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DUBOWITZ: Well, there was a statement put out by the UK and Germany. I think Italy was in there. Japan was in there. The Japanese prime minister is obviously in Washington today meeting the president. And I think you're going to hear from our Gulf allies, you may hear from the Indians, the Koreans, others who are starting to join this coalition. I mean, because at the end of the day – I mean, the fact of the matter is the United States of America gets about 3 percent to 5 percent of our total energy needs from the Gulf. Japan gets 70 percent. By the way, the one country we haven't really talked about with respect to Hormuz, that gets a high percentage of its energy needs from the Gulf, is China.

MAY: Yeah, almost 50 percent of its oil comes from there.

DUBOWITZ: And if I were the Gulf States who are providing the other 50 percent to China, I'd be calling Xi Jinping in Beijing. And I'd be saying, "So, you know that oil and natural gas that you depend on to drive the Chinese economy? So, here's what you're going to do. You're going to call your friends in Tehran and you're going to tell them to knock it off. Because if not, then we can't provide energy. And when this is all over, we're going to have to recalculate."

MAY: Right. Although Tehran is saying, "We'll let the ships through to go to China, but nowhere else because their conceit at least, is we control – is this is our body of water."

DUBOWITZ: No, no, no. No, but I...

MAY: "You can do it. You go close to our shoreline and you'll get through." And the only ships that have gone through are China, no?

DUBOWITZ: That's exactly right. But my point is not the oil and natural gas that's going to China from Iran. My point is the other 50 percent of the oil and natural gas that's going from the Gulf countries to China.

MAY: Those aren't being allowed to go through by the regime? OK. I thought maybe they were allowing that to go through. If you're going to China, it's fine. If you're going to Japan, no.

(CROSSTALK)

DUBOWITZ: Whatever's being allowed through.

MAY: This is why I got to take control of the street.

DUBOWITZ: No, what the political point I'm making is that if you're the GCC, you're currently under attack by Iran. Tankers are not going through except the ones that are going to China.

You're going to say to the Chinese, "At the end of the day, call your friends in Tehran, tell them to knock it off because this is a threat to the GCC, our security and our economy." In other words, the GCC has leverage over China because the GCC is providing 50 percent of China's energy needs. Point being here is that the Battle of Hormuz is a military battle, which President Trump's got to win. And it's a political battle and it's an economic battle. And it's too early in this campaign to know how we're doing. I think militarily, Admiral Cooper, General Caine, and the United States is taking out the offensive capability methodically day by day – missiles, drones, fast attack crafts – and moving forward in a patient and careful way. And that's important. So, for all the naysayers who said, "There was no plan. They didn't have a plan." Nonsense.



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I mean, CENTCOM has had a plan to open up Hormuz probably since the days of Jimmy Carter, when we were much more dependent on the Gulf for our energy needs. The question then is, do we win that militarily? Does President Trump play the Trump card? Which is Kharg Island, which we can talk about. And what does it mean to take back Kharg Island and what kind of leverage does that give the United States against Iran? And then we move into building the coalition, making sure there's lots of flags alongside the US flag as we think about convoys and then move into the next phase of ensuring that we win the Battle of Hormuz, the Iranians decisively lose. Because without that, however much military degradation we've done to the Islamic Republic, if we lose the Battle of Hormuz, that is a political and economic defeat for the United States.

MAY: Alright. I want to talk a little bit about Kharg Island, but fast because I got about three – I got to tell you too many subjects, that I want to keep this, for you for your sake, about to an hour. Amazing what happened on Kharg Island where the bombing was so precise, according to the president, that we knocked out all the military facilities, but left the oil infrastructure intact. Important to understand why he did that. I think, and this is an odd kind of – when my father fought in the South Pacific in World War II, he was fighting the Japs. He wasn't fighting the imperial regime. He was fighting the Japs, let's face it. He was clear. And plenty of people talk about, "They fought the Germans in World War II." We're trying to fight a regime and we're trying to – we want only the best for the people.

And you want that, I know very much, and everybody here at FDD does, and I think Trump does too. So, part of what he's saying is, "We're going to leave that because that's economically vital for the people of Iran, if we can end up with a decent government in Iran." But it's also – if he says, "If we don't end up with a decent government, I can cut off all the income to this regime, all of it." And the Marines who are coming – and it's going to take them a little while to get there with amphibious vessels. My guess is they can take that island a few hours. If you've knocked out most of the military – and I don't think the military on that island is huge – you're not going to have much of a resistance on that island. So Kharg Island is important longer term, if we understand all that.

Anyhow, I'll stop there for a second because I'm sure you have some things you want to say about that.

DUBOWITZ: I mean, Kharg Island, just to understand this – so, Iran's oil exports generate about \$78 billion a year. It's about 50 percent of the Iranian state budget. That \$78 billion pays for three years of the budget of the entire Iranian military security intelligence and proxy terror forces. So just again, \$78 billion a year in annual oil revenues, 50 percent of state budget, \$78 billion in annual oil revenues pays for three years of the military security intelligence and terror proxy budget. That's how important it is. And about 90 to 95 percent of that 78 billion in oil exports goes through Kharg Island. So, you control Kharg Island, you choke the regime. If the regime is not getting \$78 billion a year, they can't pay their military, they can't pay their security, they can't pay their intelligence, and they can't pay the terror proxies. I mean, if you want to talk about fracturing the regime, if you want to talk about mass defections, one of the ways you do that is you got to strike at the financial artery of the regime so that the regime can't actually pay the 150,000 members of the IRGC, the 2.2 million members of the Basij, right? The tens of thousands of members of the Ministry of Intelligence, and can't actually fund Hezbollah, Hamas, the Iraqi Shiite militias, the Houthis. That's how you do it.



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And that's how you actually start to facilitate the kind of defections and regime fracturing and undermining the elite support base of the regime that we need for phase three. So, that when Iranians take to the streets, they're not facing a unified, ruthless, and effective security apparatus. It's all connected. And that's why Kharg Island is so important. Now, I'm not a military planner. I don't know how easy it is to take Kharg Island. I don't know how easy it is to hold Kharg Island. I don't know if Marines on Kharg Island will then be under relentless drone and missile fire from the coasts. I think that's part of the reason why the US military is taking out those offensive capabilities, not only to protect tankers that are going to go through the Straits of Hormuz, but also if the Marines take Kharg island, you want to get as much of that offensive capability neutralized.

MAY: Well, by the end of the exercise, we want Iran – the regime to have no offensive capabilities and frankly, no defensive military capabilities. They don't need them. Because people say, "Well, it's a mountainous country." No one's trying to conquer it. No one wants to send an infantry to conquer it. The Israelis couldn't do it. The US doesn't want to do it. But we want them not to be a threat to the US or to our allies or to their own people. That's what we want.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. So, Kharg Island is, I think, a really important step up that escalation ladder if President Trump decides to play that card. And that requires troops. And again, politically, one has to ask, is the president going to be prepared to commit so-called boots on the ground and risk US lives to take out Kharg Island? Which I think is a good segue to the nuclear issue.

MAY: OK.

DUBOWITZ: Now on the nuclear side, we've seen some evidence in the past three weeks of the United States and Israel going after some nuclear sites, but it hasn't been a major priority yet. And I think part of that is, again, this is a phased operation that really began with strikes against regime leadership, decapitation, and going after the military arsenal and the war making capabilities in the defense industrial base of their regime.

As we plan a Battle of Hormuz, as we start to think about Kharg Island, as we start to think about what is the next stage of this operation. And I think the next stage of the military operation, I would hope, is to do severe damage to what remains of Iran's nuclear program. There's two major issues – three major issues, actually. One is in Isfahan. A second is in Isfahan and Natanz. And a third is just near Natanz. Those are the locations. What am I actually talking about here? Well, let me start with Isfahan. In Isfahan right now, there's two problems we have. One is that we think about half of the highly enriched uranium, which is uranium that's been enriched to 60 percent, which is 97 percent of what you need to get to nuclear weapons, is buried under the rubble in Isfahan as a result of the strikes, the mostly Tomahawk strikes and Israeli military strikes from the June 12-Day War. Half the HEU [Highly Enriched Uranium] under Isfahan.

In Isfahan as well, according to the IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency, we're concerned that Iran may be building a new enrichment facility there and the IAEA cannot confirm whether that facility is complete, whether their centrifuges already installed or there's just...

MAY: Which is in Isfahan, still?

DUBOWITZ: That's in Isfahan.

MAY: OK.

DUBOWITZ: So, Isfahan is about a potential new enrichment facility and half of the HEU. OK. Let's shift over...

(CROSSTALK)

MAY: And that hasn't been hit in this war yet? Where they think the centrifuges are in Isfahan, not hit?



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DUBOWITZ: Not hit. And if hit, not in yet in a decisive way. In Natanz, there is also about the other half of the HEU buried under the rubble, the same thing. Israel and the United States struck that in the 12-Day War in June, but that's the other half of the HEU. So, half the HEU in Isfahan, half of it in Natanz.

MAY: Centrifuge in Natanz or no?

DUBOWITZ: They think they've destroyed many of the centrifuges. There may be some left.

MAY: OK. They could be. OK. So, you could – OK.

DUBOWITZ: I have no doubt the Iranians have other centrifuges squirreled away that have been destroyed.

MAY: OK. Well, Pickaxe Mountain is what you always talk about.

DUBOWITZ: Alright. So, that's the third thing I'm worried about. And that outside of Natanz is a place called Pickaxe Mountain.

MAY: Right.

DUBOWITZ: What the Iranians have been doing for a number of years now is they've been building underground, much deeper underground than even the Fordow facility that was struck. Hundreds of feet underground, heavily fortified, a new potential facility where they can have enrichment, centrifuge manufacturing, and they can do weaponization. And the problem with this facility is if they complete it and it has gone so deeply underground, we may not be able to destroy it from the air using even the massive ordinance penetrators that are dropped from B2 bombers that President Trump effectively used to destroy the Fordow site back in June of last year during the 12-Day War. So, that's what I worry from a nuclear perspective. It may be that all of this could be taken care of from the air. But it may be that it can't be, and that in the case of the HEU in Isfahan and Natanz, and in the case of Pickaxe Mountain itself, that the United States and/or Israel would have to send in special forces in order to run an operation to retrieve the HEU and to destroy Pickaxe Mountain.

Very complicated military operation, very difficult political decision – both the President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu to send Americans and Israelis on the ground because God forbid, they're wounded, they're killed, or they're taken hostage.

MAY: You have to enfeeble the regime before you can possibly really consider that seriously. I think, defang to a really huge extent, that'd be so that you know there's just nothing they can do about it.

DUBOWITZ: Well, exactly right. I mean, if you go to send special forces, this isn't like 20 guys from Delta Force or *Shaldag* coming in and securing the HEU and leaving. This is weeks long. You got to secure the perimeter. You might have to fight your way through it. You're going to be constantly under attack by the IRGC. There'll be missiles, there'll be drones, there may be armed combat. And you've got to get in construction machinery, you got to start digging through the rubble, you got to find the HEU canisters, and you got to pull them out. And on Pickaxe Mountain, you're going to have to get in special forces there. And there, the question is, do you have the explosive chargers that can destroy such a deeply buried facility or are you going to be introducing something that will make that inaccessible to human beings for the next hundred years, which has its own complications?



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Let's not get into what substances I'm talking about, but effectively that would be quite a difficult decision to make for any president, any prime minister. So, the remaining nuclear issues are complicated. I will say one other thing. I don't actually think that this necessarily has to get destroyed in the next couple of weeks. I think as long as we have eyes into the HEU in Isfahan and Natanz, as long as the Israelis are still flying and dominating the airspace, which they have. I mean, I think they've destroyed 85, 90 percent of the air defenses, so we have air dominance. As long as President Trump continues to support Israel, having that ability to go in and strike any sign that the Iranians are moving to retrieve the HEU. If we can detect that, and I think we've got pretty good eyes into that, the Israelis could then strike at any time.

And on Pickaxe Mountain, similarly, I don't know if we have to do it now, but we absolutely have to come up with some solution in the coming months, and certainly before President Trump leaves office in two and a half years to destroy that facility. Otherwise, Iran will rebuild its nuclear capabilities deeply underground, immunized against our and the Israeli ability to neutralize it.

MAY: Right. Alright. I'll ask you a final question, but feel free to put in any points that we haven't gotten to yet. I said I don't like to talk about wars as if they're sporting events, but for the sake of metaphor, I will. At the end of this exercise, what's a bronze medal for us? What's a silver medal? What's a gold medal?

DUBOWITZ: I think a bronze medal is that we have destroyed Iran's missile capabilities. We've taken out inventories, launchers, and done severe damage to the production capability. I mean, it is quite remarkable. Iran had the largest missile inventory in the Middle East before the 12-Day War. It was severely degraded and then reconstituted with Chinese and Russian help. And we are at the point now where we think about two-thirds of the missile launches have been either destroyed or disabled. Iran's ability to produce ballistic missiles has gone from about a hundred a month to zero. Let me underscore that, Cliff. Right now, Iran cannot produce one more ballistic missile.

MAY: But they were producing a hundred a month. I just want that to sink in.

DUBOWITZ: A hundred a month. So, if you take their...

MAY: And by the way, producing interceptors at the same rate. Probably – almost – really hard to do.

DUBOWITZ: Well, no, exactly right. I mean, if you look at what Iran's threat was, there was obviously always the nuclear threat that got a lot of attention. But if you took Iran's ballistic missile, cruise missile inventories in the thousands, their production capabilities, the ability to produce a hundred additional missiles a month – 1,200 a year – you start to imagine five years out that Iran has now got thousands and thousands, maybe tens of thousands of missiles, including ballistic missiles. So now they have this massive inventory of missiles. They are now immunized against our ability to respond to a nuclear breakout or any kind of Iranian aggression against US bases, US embassies, US allies, because those missiles become so dangerous. We're seeing part of this movie right now in action, but right now, they don't have this kind of inventory. They don't have a number of this level of launchers, and we are degrading them.

But imagine five years out, we wait...

MAY: Exactly.

DUBOWITZ: And by the way, under the JCPOA, which never dealt with missiles. We gave them a trillion dollars, an industrial sized nuclear enrichment capability, and we allowed them to build thousands and thousands and thousands of ballistic missiles. And now they are a formidable power, and our ability to confront it at that point is completely neutralized.



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So, what is a bronze medal? A bronze medal is we have taken that out. And by the way, that's a great bronze medal. We have destroyed something that in my 22 years of working on this issue, I never thought we would be able to get our arms around. I always thought, "Well, we could do some deal, and we get the Iranians to agree voluntarily on range and warhead restrictions, and we could keep them within the missile control technology regime." And it was all these diplomatic sanction solutions. I never thought we were able to do this, and it's just remarkable to me.

So that's a bronze medal. It may even be a silver medal. I think the silver medal is we do all that, we destroy their war making capability, we do severe damage to their repression apparatus, and we win the Battle of Hormuz – silver medal. Gold medal is we do everything afore mentioned.

MAY: Of course.

DUBOWITZ: But we bring down the Islamic Republic of Iran, and we replace it with a new leadership that is pro-American, pro-Israel, pro-West. And we forge the Cyrus Accords with peace between Iran, Israel, and a new Iranian leader shakes hands with an Israeli prime minister on the White House South Lawn, and President Trump gets a well-deserved Nobel Peace Prize. And all of this, by the way, I think even without the gold medal, even the silver medal, I think those accomplishments are going to fundamentally change the calculus of countries in the Middle East, even those who are deeply skeptical of normalization with Israel. That they understand that they need to be part of an American-Israeli Middle Eastern security apparatus with missile defense and intelligence integration, and that the only way that they can be protected from threats from Iran, if it remains this revolutionary regime, is if they have strong relationships with Israel under US supervision.

And then, what we have is a situation where the United States can then start to knit together a group of highly competent allies that can defend the Middle East against the threats. With Israel as a model ally, the Emirates as a model ally, maybe some other Middle Eastern countries who are like the Saudis and others, who are taking their capabilities and are being fully integrated into our security architecture and are willing to fight and are willing to defend their countries and defend the Middle East. That is where the United States now can say, "Hey, CENTCOM commander, you're in charge of this. But in terms of our military resources, we're shifting to the Indo-Pacific to take on the Chinese, defend Taiwan, defend Japan, and defend what is going to be the most important area of responsibility of the 21st century."

MAY: And hopefully do more for Ukraine at the same time so Russia doesn't begin to dominate Europe.

DUBOWITZ: Well, I think there's the opportunity I'm getting...

MAY: Yup. Yup, yup, yup.

DUBOWITZ: Take Ukraine – model ally. Take the Poles, the Lithuanians, the Estonians, the Latvians, the Czechs. Even the Germans, who are starting to kind of...

MAY: Right. The Fins.

DUBOWITZ: The Fins. Right? And start to build the same kind of – I mean, we have that security architecture, by the way. It's called NATO.

MAY: Yeah.

DUBOWITZ: But the country that's not in NATO, that needs to be a NATO is Ukraine.



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And then we actually have a security architecture. So, we have a Western European – we have a European NATO. We have a Middle Eastern NATO. All under American leadership, all backed by American force – American credibility in our defense industrial base. But we have all these allies spending money on their military who both have the will and capability to fight. And that way we contain Putin and we contain Xi. And we actually – to me – I'm very optimistic. We usher in an era, of what President Trump has talked about since he came into office in his first term of peace as opposed to war. But peace through strength and through deterrence.

MAY: Right. And at that point, I would have to say Trump has done what he wanted to do because that is the definition of Making America Great Again. It's preeminent in the world, bringing about peace, all of that. We've gone over an hour, so I'll let you go. I just want to say for the record, what a treat, what a privilege, what an honor to be in the same cognitive foxhole with you for over two decades. Very lucky for me.

DUBOWITZ: Well, thank you, Cliff. I mean, thank you for giving me the opportunity. You've been an incredible partner and an incredible mentor. And Foundation for Defense of Democracies – it was your vision. You founded it. You understood that there were beleaguered democracies that we had to defend and at the end of the day, the United States had to be the arsenal of democracy. And I'm grateful to you, so thank you.

MAY: And thanks to all of you who are with us today here on *Foreign Podicy*.

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