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**Iran's Ballistic Missile Program:
Caught between Missile Defense and a Comprehensive Deal
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Over the past eight months of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1, Tehran's ballistic missile program has been mainly relegated to the sidelines. Although several months ago there were indications that the US might be determined to include the issue in a final deal, Iran has insisted that it will not countenance discussing the missile program in negotiations with the P5+1. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei recently asserted that it was "stupid and idiotic" to expect Iran to curb its ballistic missile program, and he has given instructions to increase production of these delivery means. Significantly, in a recent interview, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel basically decoupled the missile issue from the current nuclear talks when he noted that while Iran's missile capability is on the long term US agenda, for now the P5+1 are focused on the nuclear issue.

Iran's ballistic missile program is a major threat to the Middle East and beyond. Iran already has operational missiles with ranges of 1500 to 2500 km that can reach targets in the Middle East, Turkey, and Southeast Europe. In addition, it has been working on an extended range version of the Shahab-3 and a 2000 km medium range ballistic missile, the Sejil-2, and may soon be able to produce missiles with a range of 3000 km. It also has a space launch vehicle program. According to a 2012 US Department of Defense report, Iran continues to develop long range ballistic missiles that reach beyond its regional adversaries, and may be technically capable of flight testing an ICBM by 2015. US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told the Senate Armed Services Committee in February 2014 that Iran was expected to test "a missile system that could potentially have ICBM-class range." Tehran has also enhanced the lethality and the effectiveness of its existing missile systems with improvements of accuracy and new sub-munition payloads.

According to US intelligence assessments, Iran would be most likely to deliver a nuclear weapon by means of a ballistic missile. If so, what is the rationale for not including this issue in the framework of a comprehensive deal on the nuclear front? Iran rejects the proposition on the grounds that its ballistic missile program is "non-nuclear" – it was developed for conventional and defensive purposes, a legacy of the painful experience of the war with Iraq in the 1980s. Some experts argue that the inclusion of Iran's ballistic missile program in the

P5+1 negotiations could invite new difficulties: Iran could insist, for example, that Saudi Arabian and Turkish ballistic missile programs also be addressed. Moreover, it would be very difficult to stop the ballistic missile program given its similarities to Iran's space program. Finally, if forced to deal with ballistic missiles, Iran could be expected to greatly enhance its cruise missile development instead.

Still, a comprehensive deal with Iran that ignores the missile issue would provide only limited reassurance to those countries within range of Iran's ballistic missiles, whereas an agreement that both halts Iran's nuclear program and places strict restrictions on delivery means would help reassure them in the event of an Iranian breach and move to breakout. As a supplier of components to Iran's ballistic missile program, it is perhaps not surprising that Russia supports not including ballistic missiles on the current negotiations agenda. Yet what of the United States? In February 2014, US chief negotiator Wendy Sherman struck a tough chord when she stated before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that UN Security Council resolutions on Iran, which also target ballistic missile capabilities, must be addressed. But Hagel's recent statement reflects a possible backtrack from that position.

The concerns over Iran's ballistic missile program are at the heart of US efforts to expand and consolidate its ballistic missile defense systems in the Middle East and Europe. The United States is working closely with Israel on the development of the various stages of the Arrow missile defense system, and has also tried to encourage members of the Gulf Cooperation Council to integrate their respective missile defense capabilities to establish a regional shield based on the NATO model. The United States hopes to export anti-missile systems to the Gulf, and four states have already purchased them.

However, US efforts to develop its missile defense system in Europe as a response to the Iranian threat have intensified tensions between Russia and the West. Within months of entering office, the Obama administration unveiled the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) missile defense system to replace the Bush-era anti-missile shield. The United States and NATO claim that the system is designed to deal with the dual threat of ballistic missiles and WMD from the Middle East. While NATO has not stated explicitly that the system is intended to defend Europe from an Iranian threat, US officials have suggested that Tehran is indeed a significant threat to the Alliance, warranting countermeasures. Russia rejects this claim, and maintains that the system is directed at its own strategic nuclear forces.

While the ballistic missile defense system may indeed be directed at threats from the Middle East and not at Russia, the enthusiastic support of Central and Eastern European countries for the system is based as much as anything else upon a US security commitment. Poland, Romania, and the Baltic states view the deployment of interceptors in their backyard as an enhanced form of extended deterrence against potential Russian threats, and Russia's annexation of Crimea has only strengthened the value of a missile defense system to these states. For them, Russia is the real source of the threat, not Iran. Furthermore, the Obama

administration has suggested that it could accelerate the deployment of the NATO ballistic missile defense system in Europe in response to the growing Russian threat. However, these commitments must also be viewed in the context of the US strengthening its credibility with its allies by providing protection from revisionist states beyond the Euro-Atlantic region, with an emphasis on Iran. The anti-missile shield in Europe is too limited to be able to engage Russian missiles, and is better equipped to deal with a potential threat from Iran.

In any event, given the attention devoted to the Iranian ballistic missile threat in the context of US plans for missile defense, it is difficult to comprehend why the US would bypass the threat in the nuclear talks. What could account for the US agreeing to concede the issue, focusing only on the nuclear program for now? What leverage would the US be left with in order to confront the issue after a nuclear deal is struck? Is there a connection to the Russian argument that if the true concern of US missile defense is Iran, then negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran undercut any justification for the US system, since the threat would presumably be diminished? The US/NATO response to this claim has been that the anti-missile shield in Europe would provide protection against ballistic missile systems that could also carry non-nuclear warheads. Is the US worried that inclusion of the ballistic missile threat would undercut its missile defense plans, or is the major concern that it will not be able to rely on any agreement reached with Iran? The thinking in the US on this point is not fully defined, but in light of the important questions that are raised and the inherent connection between nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, it is high time for clarification.

