

Iran Nuclear Brief: Iranian Missiles and the Comprehensive Nuclear Deal

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Iran Nuclear Brief

Analysis from the "Solving the Iranian Nuclear Puzzle" Briefing Series

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Iranian Missiles and the Comprehensive Nuclear Deal

The international community has been acutely concerned for many years about Iran's increasing capacity to produce material for nuclear weapons. With sufficient fissile material and a warhead design, Iran could use its existing ballistic missiles to pose a credible nuclear threat throughout the region. Consequently, after repeatedly directing Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, the UN Security Council decided in 2010 that Iran also had to halt all activities related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

Now that serious negotiations are under way to curtail Iran's ability to dash for a bomb, seeking ballistic missile limits as part of a comprehensive nuclear deal would be unwise. Getting adequate and verifiable constraints on Iran's nuclear program remains the highest priority. To also demand severe limits on conventional weapons that Iran regards as vital to its self-defense would jeopardize the negotiations' key objective.

HIGHLIGHTS

- A comprehensive deal between Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) that verifiably limits Iran's uranium-enrichment capacity, effectively blocks plutonium-production pathways, and enhances verification to assure detection of prohibited nuclear-weapons-related activities would dramatically reduce the potential dangers posed by Iran's ballistic missiles.
- In 2010, the UN Security Council broadened previous sanctions by adopting Resolution 1929, an effort to increase pressure on Tehran to negotiate seriously to resolve international concerns about its nuclear program by limiting sensitive nuclear-weapons-related activities.
 - o Resolution 1929 was adopted at a time when the International Atomic Energy Agency's questions about weapons-related experiments were not being answered, Iran's capacity to produce fissile material was increasing, and Iran's nuclear weapons development potential was growing.
 - o The resolution's prohibition on "any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using ballistic missile technology" was never intended by the Security Council to be permanent.
- Today, Iran is assessed to have deployed several dozen Shahab-3 and Ghadr-1 medium-range ballistic missiles with ranges of 1,000 to 1,600 kilometers, as well as dozens more short-range ballistic missiles with ranges of 150 to 500 kilometers.
 - o All ballistic missiles with the capability of delivering a 500-kilogram payload 300 kilometers or more are commonly considered "nuclear capable."
 - o To prevent Iran from having any such capability would require severe restrictions, such as the 150-kilometer missile flight-testing limit imposed on vanquished Iraq in 1991.
 - o Iran has been adamant that it will not accept removal of the only weapons systems it can reliably employ beyond the battlefield.
- Limits on Iranian ballistic missiles could be more effectively pursued outside the nuclear talks in a multilateral, regional context.
 - o The initial objective could be reciprocal confidence-building measures among neighboring countries.
 - o Multilateral limits, such as a regional ban on intermediate-range and intercontinental ballistic missiles – could also be pursued.

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Now that serious negotiations are under way to curtail Iran's ability to dash for a bomb, seeking ballistic missile limits as part of a comprehensive nuclear deal would be unwise. Getting adequate and verifiable constraints on Iran's nuclear program remains the highest priority. The best way to address Iran's potential to exploit nuclear-capable missiles is to ensure that Iran's nuclear program is

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sufficiently limited and transparent. To also demand severe limits on conventional weapons that Iran regards as vital to its self-defense would jeopardize the negotiations' key objective.

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