

## Judging a P5+1 Agreement with Iran: The Key Technical and Strategic Issues

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The last few weeks have seen a polarized debate about a possible nuclear arms agreement with Iran that has sometimes gone from narrow partisanship to strategic infantilism. Both sides of the Iran debate have focused on a few narrow parameters of the overall agreement as distinguished from the real merits and risks of any proposed agreement.

The issue should be debated on its merits, and they should be examined in terms of all the key parameters, not simply a focus on Iran's current and present capacity for enrichment. These merits also need to be judged in terms of what any arms control agreement can credibly be expected to accomplish.

Arms control is not an extension of war by other means, but it is scarcely an exercise in altruism. Its success lies in its ability to strengthen deterrence and stability between potentially hostile powers and – like arms races and military build-ups – it is most meaningful with all involved having a strong incentive to compete in exploiting the terms of the agreement, if not actively cheat.

The Washington Naval Arms Treaty of the 1920's laid the groundwork for naval competition before World War II, not stability. It led to a competition in ship size, armor, and weaponry even to the uncertain extent it limited ship numbers. The first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) led to a competition in building missiles to the treaty limits, a competition in deploying more strategic nuclear warheads, and helped accelerate the competition in building up the uncontrolled size of theater nuclear forces.

Any initial nuclear treaty between Iran and the P5+1 is almost certain to be an equal competition between Iran and its neighbors, if only because a nuclear agreement will not—by itself—bring broader stability to Iran's competition in other areas with its Arab neighbors, the United States and Israel.

### A. Winning A “Zero Sum Game:” Treating Arms Control as an Ongoing Duel Over Time

The negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran are essentially an extension of a decades' long zero sum game. They are a duel in which each side has had—and will continue to have—every incentive to seek its own advantage. This not only has shaped the current negotiations, it will shape the future behavior of the states involved. They will seek to exploit any resulting agreement to their advantage throughout the period it is in force.

The United States and its allies want to preserve the current level of regional stability and deterrence, and to limit Iran's ambitions and the potential threat it poses to the region. Iran's ruling elite wants security, freedom from economic sanctions, internal stability, and added freedoms to pursue its own ideological and regional ambitions.

There is no present evidence that the negotiations will lead to any form of broader détente. There has been no major change in Iran's stated hostility to the United States and Israel, its rivalry with its neighbors, or its insecurities and ambitions. The “moderates” in the Iranian government are products of the same revolutionary elite as its “hardliners.” These “moderates” may be more oriented towards Iran's economic needs, more pragmatic in assessing the balance of power and self-interest, and more diplomatic, but Iran's power structure is tied to its Supreme Leader, and its Revolutionary Guards and other hardliners still have massive influence.

At the same time, their attitudes must be kept in perspective. They operate in the context of memories of the Iran-Iraq War, and its suffering, isolation, and the missile and chemical weapons attacks during that conflict. Just as Israelis remember the holocaust, Iran has memories of its own and ones reinforced by the rise of Sunni religious extremism and by the growing tensions between Sunnis and Shi'ites.

Iran is isolated politically, religiously and ethnically. That isolation is largely of Iranian making, but Iran's present leaders see Iran as being under constant threat, and its actions as being "defensive" even when others see them as "offensive." They feel the regime that has a duty to both protect itself and to protect its faith and nation, at least its "hardliners" have repeatedly made it publically clear that they feel Iran is being forced to do whatever is necessary and expedient to achieve its goals.

Change may still come in the future, and there are good underlying reasons why strategic cooperation would offer all sides advantages at a time when there is a growing threat from non-state actors. It is important to understand that all arms control agreements evolve over time in the context of whether the competition that created them increases or diminishes.

*Accordingly, one key aspect in judging any arms control agreement is its review provisions, the extent to which it explicitly covers real and potential violations, and the ability to terminate the agreement and/or negotiate changes.* Assuming that an agreement signed in the spring of 2015 can bind the future for 10 to 15 years in terms of the region's politics and outside interests, a shifting military balance, changes in military and dual technology, increases in industrial capacity, is intellectually absurd. Like the predicting end of history, it borders on being a practical joke.

## **B. Acting on the Basis of Iran's Track Record in Failing to Honor Existing Agreements**

It is equally clear that another key aspect will be the ability to verify, rather than act on trust. Lifting sanctions on Iran does not allow for deception. In contrast, Iran has established clear historical precedents to show that it will try to exploit any nuclear agreement, and it has good strategic reasons to do so. Iran has a long and established record of trying the "game" or "cheat" its nuclear programs that has been well documented by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and many other sources.

The most recent IAEA reports on Iran, as well as virtually all press leaks about the negotiations indicate that Iran has not clarified any of the major questions the IAEA has raised in its years of challenging Iran to deal with the indications it has been developing nuclear weapons.

## **A Past of Denial and Delay versus Compliance**

As the IAEA report to the Security Council of February 19, 2015 makes clear, Iran has not clarified its actions in any of the unresolved issues that the IAEA has raised related to [possible weapons activity](#) like the initiation of high explosives and neutron transport calculations. It has not addressed the actions raised in the military annexes of IAEA reports since 2010, and "has not proposed any new practical measures to deal with them."

In fact, if one reads the section of the report dealing with "Possible Military Dimensions," the IAEA makes it clear that it has received new – if unspecified – data indicating that Iran may have a nuclear weapons program:

58. Previous reports by the Director General have identified outstanding issues related to possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme and actions required of Iran to resolve these. The Agency remains concerned about the possible existence in Iran of undisclosed nuclear related activities involving military related organizations, including activities related to the development of a nuclear payload for a missile. Iran is required to cooperate fully with the Agency on all outstanding issues, particularly those which give rise to concerns about the possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme, including by providing access without delay to all sites, equipment, persons and

documents requested by the Agency.

59. The Annex to the Director General's November 2011 report (GOV/2011/65) provided a detailed analysis of the information available to the Agency at that time, indicating that Iran has carried out activities that are relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device. This information is assessed by the Agency to be, overall, credible. *The Agency has obtained more information since November 2011 that has further corroborated the analysis contained in that Annex.*

60. In February 2012, Iran dismissed the Agency's concerns, largely on the grounds that Iran considered them to be based on unfounded allegations, and in August 2014, Iran stated that "most of the issues" in the Annex to GOV/2011/65 were "mere allegations and do not merit consideration".

61. As indicated above (para. 10), since the Director General's previous report, Iran has not provided any explanations that enable the Agency to clarify the two outstanding practical measures relating to the initiation of high explosives and to neutron transport calculations (see Annex I).

62. Since the Director General's previous report, at a particular location at the Parchin site, the Agency has observed, through satellite imagery, the presence of vehicles, equipment and probable construction materials, but no further external changes to the buildings on the site. As previously reported, the activities that have taken place at this location since February 2012 are likely to have undermined the Agency's ability to conduct effective verification. It remains important for Iran to provide answers to the Agency's questions<sup>72</sup> and access to the particular location at the Parchin site.

63. As indicated in previous reports and as reiterated by the Director General following his meetings in Tehran in August 2014, the Agency needs to be able to conduct a "system" assessment of the outstanding issues contained in the Annex to GOV/2011/65. This will involve considering and acquiring an understanding of each issue in turn, and then integrating all of the issues into a "system" and assessing that system as a whole. In this regard, the Agency remains ready to accelerate the resolution of all outstanding issues under the Framework for Co-operation. This can be realised by increased co-operation by Iran and by the timely provision of access to all relevant information, documentation, sites, material and personnel in Iran as requested by the Agency. Once the Agency has established an understanding of the whole picture concerning issues with possible military dimensions, the Director General will report on the Agency's assessment to the Board of Governors.

### **A Nuclear Competition that Exists in a Much Broader Strategic Context**

As for the values and goals of Iran's leaders, the search for a nuclear agreement must be kept in a broader strategic and political context. Iran's senior leadership has said from the very start – openly and explicitly – that it is not negotiating because of any basic change in policy. Iran is negotiating because of sanctions and necessity. It faces major outside challenges and military rivalry.

At the same time, the nuclear issue is only part of the strategic competition that Iran faces with its neighbors and outside states. Iran is caught up in four other major areas of strategic competition with its neighbors and the United States:

1. A growing sectarian struggle over the future of Islam and religious legitimacy that is increasingly driven by violent religious extremism and sectarian clashes.
2. A competition between Iran's growing force of conventionally armed rockets and missiles, and the steadily increasing airpower, precision strike, missile, and missile defense capabilities of the Arab Gulf states, Israel, and the United States.

3. Iran's ongoing efforts to use its growing air-sea-missile capabilities for asymmetric warfare in the Gulf to offset the Arab Gulf and U.S.-British-French lead in conventional weapons and to pressure other regional powers and deter or influence the United States; and
4. Iran's role in a broader regional struggle for regional power and influence with neighboring Arab states— tied in part to the Iranian exploitation of Israeli-Palestinian tensions and Shiite factions in Lebanon Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Yemen.

Given this background, Iran can be expected to push any agreement to its limits – and beyond -- as long as it has its present regime and political character and has to mix its ambitions with very real outside threats. Once again, its “moderates” and “pragmatists” may have different priorities than its “hardliners” and extremists,” but all will see Iran as to some extent a nation that is under siege, and that faces security threats that it must respond to – with all of the ruthlessness and expediency shown by other nations in its position.

### **The Key Criteria for “Winning” the Duel**

This does not mean that a practical agreement cannot be negotiated that provides a workable modus vivendi to both the P5+1 and Iran. It does mean that any such agreement must be judged by several key criteria that have been largely ignored in the present ideologically-charged debate over whether any feasible agreement should be signed:

- ***Explicit analysis of Iran's options for stretching the agreement's terms to the limit of the agreement's wording and beyond.*** Iran may or may not pursue a given path to trying to exploit the agreement or cheat, but no agreement can be judged on basis of trust. There needs to be explicit analysis of what Iran might do over time, how well it could be detected, and how dangerous the end result would really be. Condemning or praising the agreement on the basis of politics is no substitute for systematic analysis.
- ***The details regarding the IAEA's right of inspection – and particularly rapid challenge inspection.*** The ability to verify compliance will be at least as critical as any formal agreement to reduce or limit enrichment. The terms for challenge inspection will be critical and so will the right to examine any suspect facility. Inspection must cover research and development activity, as well as potential arming of delivery systems, and not simply declared nuclear facilities.
- ***The extent to which Iran does – or pledges to – address the IAEA's issues relating to the possible military dimensions of Iran's programs and research activities.***

This does not necessarily mean Iran must comply immediately in every areas, or without some quid pro quo in terms of lifting sanctions. It does not mean Iran must admit openly to a weapons program. It does mean that it must address the issues fully, permit suitable inspection, and change its behavior in areas where possible violations have been detected.

It also means that member states, and particularly the members of the P5+1, must continue to devote major resources to intelligence collection and analysis to support the IAEA. The IAEA can only collect information on its own through formal inspection or dialogue with Iran. If it is to confront Iran with a suitable mix of deterrents to any violation of the agreement, or stretching its limits, it will need the continuing support of outside intelligence efforts for the length of the agreement. There is no way that the IAEA can win this duel on its own.

### **C. The Need for More Transparency in Supporting Intelligence Assessments to Provide a Valid Basis for Judging an Agreement in Context**

This need to judge Iran's activities and progress to date raises another key question that any debate over a final agreement must address far more openly than the Obama Administration and other members of the P5+1

have done to date, and which the agreement's critics have largely ignored in their focus on Iran's ability to obtain fissile material to the exclusion of most other aspects of its nuclear weapons program.

Unless the U.S. intelligence community has far better data on Iran's programs than any of its unclassified reporting has indicated – an issue that can only be addressed through far better unclassified reporting and analysis – Iran cannot suddenly go from zero to sixty in making nuclear weapons. The Indian, Pakistani, and North Korean experiences all indicate that getting enough material for a fissile weapon or several fissile weapons is very different from having proven weapons designs based on actual testing in a fissile event or on the kind of test and design data that Israel got from France or another power a decade ago.

### **Negotiation Without Transparency**

At present, however, there is no credible way to judge this aspect of Iran's program – or a nuclear agreement – using unclassified data. The United States has not provided any declassified assessment of how far Iran has gotten in its ability to design a working set of nuclear weapons, carry out tests or simulation of such a weapons reliability and yield, and related test activity.

If the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) has not provided any formal update to the hurried and poorly drafted summary of its nuclear National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iran called *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities* that it released in December 2007. Other reporting like White House statements and the threat assessments by the DNI and DIA have been without substantive content.

The Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) did provide some insight into an update of this NIE that was issued in 2012, but did not result in any unclassified summary. The [ISIS analysis](#) focused on Iran's enrichment activity, and noted that:

The new NIE includes that Iran could be furthering its development of components for nuclear weapons while reportedly assessing that not enough activity has occurred on weaponization to justify a determination that Iran has made a decision to restart its nuclear weaponization program or build a bomb.<sup>1</sup> Both NIEs judge that Iran had a nuclear weaponization program prior to 2004. [*Missing in ISIS's information about the new NIE is the confidence level that the intelligence community has in its ability to detect a restart and the level of detected activity necessary to determine that a restart has occurred.*] The 2007 NIE judged with moderate confidence that restart had not happened as of mid-2007. [*It should be noted that this assessment about restart was rejected by key European allies and Israel, which all assessed that Iran was likely continuing to develop its nuclear weaponization capabilities and that its nuclear weapons program likely existed after 2003.*]

The most detailed official picture of Iran's weapons activities now available is still the military annex to the IAEA's [November 2011 report](#) to the Director General (GOV/2011/65). Accordingly, there is no valid way that opponents of the agreement can state a reasonable estimate for how soon the ability to produce fissile material can actually be transformed into a weapon. Equally, there is no valid way that supporters of the agreement can state how far Iran has progressed in testing and design, or how much it would have to cheat to complete all of the activities necessary actually build and deploy a workable weapon.

Moreover, there is no way to judge whether Iran would need to actually conduct tests on the order of actual weapons tests or fissile events, or could credibly rely on its own simulations, design activity, and the design data the IAEA indicate it may have gotten from outside sources.

### **Why This Poses Critical Issues**

This is a critical set of issues because:

- *Working, reliable, and safe nuclear weapons are radically different from crude test platforms and – depending on Iran’s concern with safety, reliability, and predictable effects – could add years to the time needed to deploy a meaningful nuclear armed force.*
- *It is unclear whether Iran would need to carry out a fissile event or on actual weapons test – the most detectable red line in enforcing an agreement – or could rely on a test facility using sub-critical material that it may have conducted or designed at the facility it demolished at Parchin.*
- *To date, Iran has refused to include its ballistic missile program in proposed agreements in spite of reports it has designed a nuclear warhead for these missiles.*
- *There is no open source indication of capability to detect still critical weapons-related R&D activity.*
- *There is no real way to determine the credibility of an agreement in limiting break out time, or the full importance of restrictions on detectable enrichment activity, without more information.*
- *The uncertainties relating to Iran’s weapons design progress are compounded by the lack of open-source analysis of its ability to design far smaller covert enrichment facilities using more advanced centrifuges over time. This is critical in assessing the value of the duration of an agreement as well as limits on enrichment and enrichment related R&D activity.*

The Obama Administration and other P5+1 governments can, of course, play the classification and voice of authority cards. The past history of both the Obama Administration and its predecessors, however, is that they rarely play them well. In this case, both outside proponents and opponents of the agreement need to realize there is no present way to judge any final agreement in the context of whether it does or does not provides a credible approach to “trust but verify” without additional intelligence and supporting technical data.

#### **D. Putting the Agreement in a Valid Strategic Context: Iranian Nuclear Break Out in the Face of a Mature Israeli Nuclear Capability**

For all the reasons summarized earlier, it is equally important that any agreement be judged in the full strategic context of its impact on regional security, rather than simply in the narrow context of how it controls Iran’s nuclear activities.

#### **Israel as a Nuclear Weapons State**

One critical step is to look beyond the current focus on the threat to Israel. Iran’s potential nuclear threat to Israel is all too real, but it still needs to be kept in a far more honest context than has been debated to date.

No one has a credible estimate of the number and types of Israeli nuclear weapons, or the size of its nuclear-armed missile forces, but no expert doubts the fact Israel has been a nuclear power for decades. Most experts would probably agree that Israel has had significant access to proven thermonuclear and boosted nuclear weapons designs. It may have conducted at least one fissile event test in cooperation with South Africa during the time it had an active nuclear weapons program.

It is also clear from satellite photos in Jane’s and a wide range of other sources that Iran has had missile of a size and capability to launch large nuclear warheads at any target in Iran since at least the mid-1980s.

#### **Who Poses the Real Current Existential Threat?**

Iran’s nuclear program must be judged in the context that it scarcely leads the regional nuclear arms race. A nuclear armed Iran may someday pose an “existential threat” to Israel, but the ability to race towards some form of experimental fissile test device is completely different from the ability to deploy proven and predictable nuclear weapons on a force large enough to pose a credible threat, and rushing forward with low yield fissile weapons cannot produce anything like the killing power of a mature Israel nuclear force.

When it comes to existential threats, Iran does have a vastly larger population than Israel. The CIA [puts](#) that population at 80.8 million versus 7.8 million for Israel. At the same time, the Persian part of the population that dominates Iranian politics and perceptions is roughly half of the total, and Iran is hyperurbanized to the point where 70% of its population is urban as well as the core of its economy.

One thermonuclear strike on Tehran – with a population of over 7 million – would be as devastating to Iran as a nuclear strike on Tel Aviv – with a population of 3.4 million -- would be to Israel. Throw in five other targets -- Mashad (2.7 million), Esfahan (1.8 million) Karaj (1.6 million), Tabriz (1.5 million) and Shiraz (1.3 million) -- and there really isn't much of a modern state or a recent history left.

Iran cannot win a nuclear arms race with Israel, it can only drive it to deploy a steadily larger and more sophisticated force that can kill more Iranians, constantly risking both Israel's nuclear preemption in the early phases of an Iranian nuclear program and driving Israel in a more risky form of Launch on Warning posture as well as to strengthen its advantage in missile defenses. And, anyone who has talked seriously to Iranians in second track diplomacy and privately raised these issues know that they know Israel is a major nuclear power that can survive any Iranian strike to devastate Iran.

Relying on a "rational bargainer" approach to security does, however, have an element of suicidal risk. There have been enough irrational, genocidal conflicts in recent history so no one can count on an edge in mutual assured destruction. Israel could still be a risk in some future crisis, but Iran's real goals in shaping its nuclear program almost certainly do not lie in some horribly misstated picture of Esther's all too uncertain role in history. (Most archeologists agree that the entire story is apocryphal.)

#### **E. The Iranian Threat to Its Arab Neighbors and the U.S. Role in Gulf**

Iran has every incentive to make Israel and the United States the rationale for its military actions and build-up. Iran's attacks on Israel make it the perfect scapegoat for Iran's broader regional ambitions. It helps keep Arabs and other Muslims who oppose Israel from focusing on the fact that the real focus of Iran's efforts has been to overcome the military legacy of isolation and weakness that developed during the Iran-Iraq War, and above all its search to both secure itself and influence or dominate the region and its Arab neighbors.

While Iran's current leaders almost certainly do actually oppose Israel's role in the Middle East -- and some probably actually oppose its very existence -- Israel is probably far more important as an excuse for Iran's military actions. Attacks on Israel can justify actions in Lebanon, Syria, and other parts of the Arab world. They allow Iran to rationalize its actions in terms of Greater and Lesser Satans like the United States and Israel as if it had no fears or ambitions affecting Arab states.

While Khamenei and the Shah may have little else in common, they both have sought to make Iran the dominant power in the Gulf, with the difference that Khamenei's Iran is involved in a major religious competition as well and at a time when the issue no longer is Iran's ability to export its Islamic revolution broadly, but a competition between Sunni and Shi'ite.

At the same time, many of the reasons behind Iran's actions may be equally defensive. Attacking Iran as a terrorist nation without any regard to its recent history ignore the fact that Iran has legitimate fears and concerns. Iran's leaders lived through the Iran-Iraq War, and saw all of Iran's neighbors but an Alawite-led Syria turn against it. It both has created threats to its neighbors in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq and seen active opposition to its role and future security. Violent Jihadism compounds the sectarian divisions in Islam.

That said, there still is no clear basis for distinguishing between Iran's search for security and its ambitions. As a result, any change in Iran's search for nuclear weapons needs to be judged in terms of its impact on its Arab neighbors in terms of other forms of strategic and military competition at four different levels -- all of which involve the United States directly as the key outside source of military power in the region, and none of which will be affected by any nuclear arms control agreement:

## **The Massive Conventional Arms Build Up in the Gulf area.**

The Southern Gulf states have a major lead in a key aspect of conventional military power over Iran, both in terms of money and in access to modern conventional arms that Iran is denied by sanctions. The Gulf Cooperation Council States (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE), Egypt, and Jordan, have spent more than \$40 billion on new advanced conventional arms in the last eight years, and have well over \$50 billion more in the pipeline. The Arab states are also backed by the massive power projection capabilities of the United States, as well as the power projection forces of Britain and France.

Iran, in contrast, has not been able to modernize many of the systems it bought under the Shah and during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) – some 20 to 40 years ago. It has modernized many of these systems, produced limited numbers of its own weapons, and found various ways to cheat sanctions and work around their limits, but it is more of a military museum than a Gulf superpower.

This is one key reason Iran has sought nuclear weapons. An Iranian mix of nuclear-armed aircraft and missiles could act as a powerful potential equalizer – threatening its neighbors with nuclear weapons that they do not possess and raising critical questions as to whether the United States would stay and actually deliver on the promise of a “defense umbrella” or extended deterrence [offered](#) by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton:

“We want Iran to calculate what I think is a fair assessment, that if the US extends a defense umbrella to the region, if we do even more support to support the military capacity of those in the Gulf, it’s unlikely that Iran will be any stronger or safer, because they won’t be able to intimidate or dominate, as they apparently believe they can, once they have a nuclear weapon.”

The obvious risk of such Iranian efforts is that Iran may end up pushing Saudi Arabia and other Arab states to acquire their own nuclear weapons – although Iran might still acquire a nuclear weapons monopoly for five to ten years. The Arab states would face major challenges and time constraints in creating a full fuel cycle, enrichment facilities, and actual nuclear weapons unless they could buy weapons from a state like Pakistan.

Similarly, the end result of Iran’s action might well be for the United States to fully define the form a guarantee of extended deterrence would take and to make a more formal commitment to its regional allies. It could also be some form of preventive attack if U.S. military planning indicates that Iran’s key facilities can be targeted and destroyed – either if Iran does not sign an agreement and clearly proceeds to build a bomb or clearly violates an agreement to pursue a weapon.

Nevertheless, Iran’s leaders may still have concluded that these risks are worth running, and no outside state will attack its regime or launch a major war that exploit their outside lead in air and naval power if Iran has a credible nuclear weapons delivery capability.

***Accordingly, any nuclear agreement with Iran must be judged in terms of its broader impact on the military balance in the region. This may mean accepting a significant degree of Iranian enrichment activity if there is a convincing argument that the agreement will indefinitely delay any Iranian deployment of nuclear-armed forces.***

## **Iran’s Efforts to Compensate for Its Weaknesses in Modern Combat Aircraft, Precision Strike, and Naval Power with a Steadily Growing Ballistic Missile Program.**

It is clear that no aspect of a proposed agreement would affect the fact that Iran is steadily building up a major force of long-range missiles that can reach across the Gulf and attack any area in the Arab states around it. These forces currently have the range to hit any key target, but they lack the accuracy, reliability, and lethality with conventional warheads to hit critical military and infrastructure targets.

Without precision strike capability, Iran's missile forces are more terror weapons than weapons of mass effectiveness, although they could be fired in volleys with more potential lethality. The risk they pose is also sufficiently low so that they can be countered – at least in part and possibly up to high attack levels – by the growing missile defenses of the Gulf states and the wide areas defenses on the guided missile defense ships the United States has deployed to the Gulf.

In short, there is a major missile arms race already underway in the region, but one where Iran faces serious limitations and ones that exist regardless of whether the Arab states seek to acquire their own nuclear weapons and the US offers a tangible form of extended deterrence. At the same time, Iran must deal with the steady growth of Arab airpower and holdings of long-range precision guided air-to-ground missiles, as well as Arab advanced missile defenses. Saudi Arabia has upgraded its Chinese-supplied, conventionally armed missiles. The United States has long shown the capabilities of its conventional cruise missiles.

Iran has two potential counters to this aspect of the regional military balance, both of which it seems to have pursued. One is deploying nuclear-armed missiles that massively increase the risk to Arab states of relying on missile defenses or launching air attacks if Iran escalates.

The second is developing ballistic missiles with precision guided warheads that can attack key point military facilities, high value petroleum facilities, and critical infrastructure plants like power plants and electric generating plants. These could replace weapons of mass destruction with weapons of mass effectiveness.

Iran has already developed shorter-range missiles with a reasonable degree of precision strike capability and begun to make growing claims about the accuracy and destructiveness of its longer-range systems. While these are potentially vulnerable to Arab and U.S. missile defenses, Iran could potentially largely exhaust the reserves of defensive missiles by firing older and far cheaper systems or mix salvos of different missile types in ways that would enhance the probability that precision-guided systems would penetrate.

It is at least possible that Iran might be willing to trade away a nuclear option for its missiles and shift resources to large-scale deployments of precision-guided conventional missiles, but there is no indication as yet that it is willing to do so.

***As a result, any nuclear agreement with Iran must be judged on the basis of a net assessment of its impact on the overall balance of U.S. and Arab airpower, missile power, and missile defenses relative to Iran, and not simply in the narrow context of whether Iran does or not acquire some token holdings of nuclear weapons.***

### **Shielding Iran's Steady Build-Up in Asymmetric Sea-Air-Missile Forces in the Gulf**

Iran has steadily tried to compensate for its conventional weaknesses by building up a major capability for asymmetric warfare in the Gulf. It has bought submarines and submersibles, "smart" mines, land-based anti-ship missiles, marines and the naval branch of the Revolutionary Guards, drones, maritime patrol aircraft, small missile-armed patrol boats, high speed suicide small craft, and air delivered anti-ship missiles into the equation. It has developed a wide range of dispersal and basing capabilities along the Gulf coast and the Gulf of Oman, in islands in the Gulf, as well as sensor and observation posts.

The problem with such forces, however, is the potential ease with which the superior conventional air, sea, and missile power of the Arab states, United States, Britain and France can suppress such forces over time and escalate to the point of doing Iran major strategic damage by hitting critical military and civil targets.

Once again, Iran may calculate that the threat of using asymmetric forces in some form of low-level war of attrition or to try to "close the Gulf" would be far more credible if the Arab Gulf states and United States were deterred by Iran's possession of nuclear weapons. Such calculations pose obvious risks for Iran. If it tries to

bluff, the bluff may well be called. If it actually uses nuclear weapons, it may face a far more catastrophic form of counter-escalation.

*Like the other aspects of the broader regional arms race, any nuclear agreement must be judged in part by the extent to which it does or does not reduce these risks.*

### **A regional struggle for regional power and influence -- tied in part to Shiite factions – in Gaza, Lebanon Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Yemen**

The fourth set of risks will also be affected by a nuclear arms agreement. Perceptions of the relative balance of power will be affected by whether Iran signs an agreement and the extent to which it does or does not involve a given set of compromises over its terms. A weak agreement will be seen as major Iranian gain, a strong agreement as favoring the West, and no agreement as yet another warning signal of prolonged regional instability.

It seems unlikely, however, that any agreement will radically alter this aspect of the regional competition for power, and the relative influence of the United States and Iran in Iraq and Syria may have more impact on regional perceptions as may the extent to which sectarian clashes between Sunnis and Shiite at the political, terrorist, and military levels grow or diminish.

*This will be one of the most intangible and unpredictable considerations in judging an agreement, but its impact on the broader regional struggle for power and influence must still be considered.*

### **Military Options, Containment, Deterrence, and Defense**

One thing is clear, without a fundamental shift in Iran's politics, even the most successful nuclear agreement is not going to lead to some form of broad détente. The United States, Iran, and the Arab states may actually have a great deal in common in terms of strategic interests seen in purely objective terms. They could all benefit more from cooperation than competition, and from a focus on development and stability, and countering extremism and sectarian and ethnic differences

In practice, however, even the best nuclear agreement is not going to bring stability in the other areas that divide Iran from its neighbors and the United States, or end their strategic competition. The best agreement is not going to end the regional arms race, although it may alter it. It will not necessarily reduce the risk of conflict or escalation in the other – and more probable – scenarios where conflict could take place.

This does not mean such an agreement will not eventually prove to be a useful prelude to broader improvements in political and strategic relations, but there *currently* is no clear relationship between an agreement and such a change. Like the initial Start Treaty, a successful arms agreement could be useful in reducing a key set of risks, but even a fully successful agreement seems likely to end in channeling competition into other forms at least in the near term.

This means the United States will still have to focus on cooperating with its Arab allies and Israel in containing and deterring Iran. It means that the massive arms deliveries now planned (and often already paid for) will still occur and all of the four other areas of strategic competition with Iran will continue.

At the same time, it is far from clear that any military option really exists for dealing with Iran's nuclear efforts that will bring more stability to the region, or force Iran to give up all of its nuclear programs or to avoid seeking some option like biological weapons. Iran will also almost certainly retain a wide range of options where it can play the spoiler function as well as take limited military reprisals.

*This makes it critical to examine the impact of rejecting a reasonable agreement relative to any practical alternatives, as well as examine the strengths and limits of an agreement per se. If the end result is even more strategic competition and no clear end to Iran's nuclear efforts, an agreement that offers some*

*progress and future capability to negotiate may be better than none. This does, however, also require an examination of the option of accepting temporary failure and seeing what sanctions and other non-military options can accomplish over time.* Like so many aspects of today's Middle East, there may be no good options – but this scarcely means that a realistic assessment of a proposed agreement will not show that some options are better than others.

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