

---

# FRIENDS OF ISRAEL INITIATIVE

---

## What Was Left Out of Geneva: Weaponization and Missiles

---

Friends of Israel Initiative

Paper No. 19  
Enero 10, 2014

# What Was Left Out of Geneva: Weaponization and Missiles

The debate over the “Joint Plan of Action” concluded in Geneva on November 24, 2013, between Iran and the P-5+1, has mostly focused on the question of whether Western diplomacy adequately dealt with the Tehran’s capabilities to enrich uranium and produce plutonium that could eventually be used for making an atomic bomb.

Yet one of the glaring holes in the Geneva effort is the way it barely dealt with the threat coming from Iran’s weaponization activities as well as its ballistic missile programs, like the 1300 kilometer range Shahab-3, which can strike Israel or Saudi Arabia from Iranian territory.

It is important to remember that a nuclear weapons program has three essential components: (a) weapons grade uranium or plutonium, which constitute the fuel of the nuclear device (b) weaponization, which is the assembly of the actual nuclear explosive device or warhead, and (c) delivery systems, like the ballistic missiles which carry the nuclear weapon to target. Geneva dealt only with the first component of the program.

Iran’s past weaponization work is no secret and it appears in the regular reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In May 2011, for example, the agency raised questions about the operations of “military related organizations” in Iran. Specifically, it reported design work on a “missile re-entry vehicle” being done by the Iranians “involving the removal of the conventional high explosive payload from the warhead of the Shahab-3 missile and replacing it with a spherical nuclear payload.”

For the IAEA it was important to convey the credibility of this highly sensitive information so it added a detail in its report that its intelligence on this subject was “acquired from many Member States.” In November 2011, the IAEA report repeated these suspicions adding that it had also had information that “Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device.” It called the “extensive information” it had available to it on this subject to be “credible.”

Many details on weaponization were included in a special Annex to the report. Finally, in November 2013, the IAEA clarified that since its report of two years earlier, it had obtained even more material that “further corroborates the analysis contained in that Annex.”

In light of the weaponization data that appear in its reports over the years, the IAEA has requested that Iran supply information that might clarify what it has been doing in the area of weaponization. This information was vital, for how could the IAEA verify that Iran’s nuclear program was peaceful, as Tehran incessantly argued, if the agency had concrete information that Iran was seeking to build nuclear warheads for its missiles?

But Iran has simply dismissed these concerns of the IAEA. It has refused to give IAEA inspectors access to one of the main suspected weaponization sites in Iran at Parchin, to which the IAEA was only given partial access on January 12, 2005, and refused access since that time.

## Weaponization and the Geneva Text

Given the substantial material that has accumulated and is presently in Western hands, it might have been expected that the P-5+1 at Geneva would have made full disclosure of the Iranian weaponization program one of the main conditions for sanctions relief already in their agreement, known as the Joint Plan of Action.

But the Joint Plan of Action does not say a word about weaponization or the Parchin facility. It only mentions the creation of a Joint Commission, which is supposed to work with the IAEA to “facilitate resolution of past and present issues of concern.”

The White House separately published its version of the Geneva agreement, calling it a “Fact Sheet” on what the negotiations with Iran produced. Unlike the Joint Plan of Action, the “Fact Sheet” does say explicitly that Iran will address questions concerning the “military dimension of Iran’s nuclear program.”

The “Fact Sheet” also mentions the Parchin facility specifically:

“The set of understandings also includes an acknowledgment by Iran that it must address all United Nations Security Council resolutions – which Iran

has long claimed are illegal – as well as past and present issues with Iran’s nuclear program that have been identified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This would include resolution of questions concerning the possible military dimension of Iran’s nuclear program, including Iran’s activities at Parchin”.

The “Fact Sheet” mentions Parchin in another place as well, in the context of creating a new monitoring body for verifying Iranian compliance with the agreement reached with the P-5+1:

In addition, the P5+1 and Iran have committed to establishing a Joint Commission to work with the IAEA to monitor implementation and address issues that may arise. The Joint Commission will also work with the IAEA to facilitate resolution of past and present concerns with respect to Iran’s nuclear program, including the possible military dimension of Iran’s nuclear program and Iran’s activities at Parchin.

But after its publication, Iran rejected the White House “Fact Sheet” as “a one sided interpretation” of the Joint Plan of Action, which was the only document that Tehran recognized. So if weaponization appeared in the White House “Fact Sheet”, but not in the more authoritative Joint Plan of Action, then it was not really dealt with in the understandings reached in Geneva. That meant that there was no explicit undertaking concluded at Geneva which required that Parchin be opened up for inspection or that weaponization be systematically dealt with. In short, Iran can continue its weaponization work with the implementation of the Joint Plan of Action and not be in violation of its commitments to the P-5+1.

## The History of Weaponization Suspicions

Information on the Iranian weaponization program dates back more than a decade. According to information provided by the Iranian opposition, the Lavizan-Shian Technical Research Center in northeastern Tehran was one of the sites that dealt with Iran’s weaponization program. The IAEA requested to visit Lavizan in September-October 2003.

But Iran concealed what was going on at the facility and delayed giving permission for inspectors to visit. Tehran used the time to demolish six buildings on the site. It also removed the top soil there to a depth of several

meters in order to prevent the IAEA from taking incriminating soil samples. By March 2004, it appeared that the site had been dismantled.<sup>1</sup>

In early 2005, the IAEA also sought permission to visit another suspected weaponization site in Parchin. The IAEA expressed interest in four areas that it wanted to inspect at Parchin, but the Iranians only allowed the inspectors to visit one of them. As a result, the IAEA was allowed to enter only five buildings at the Parchin complex. Since that time, Parchin remained an unresolved issue, which has remained on the IAEA's agenda with Iran; the IAEA continued to request, but was denied, access to other parts of Parchin.

Weaponization remained a central concern for the international community. The US issued on November 2007 its National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) which asserted in its "key judgments" section that in the fall of 2003, Iran halted its "nuclear weapons program, which it defined as "Iran's nuclear weapon design and weaponization work." When Iran renewed its nuclear enrichment program in January 2005, after a hiatus that resulted from its understandings with EU-3, there is no evidence that they did not also renew the work of the weaponization group at the same time.

A new development in the weaponization issue occurred in February 2008, when Olli Heinonen, then IAEA deputy director-general, gave a highly classified briefing to representatives of more than 100 states, who were accredited to the Vienna-based agency. According to a description of the meeting reported by David Sanger of the *New York Times*, Heinonen displayed original Iranian documents that he stressed came from several member states of the IAEA, and not just from the U.S.

In June 2010, the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* reported that the material came from a joint operation by German and American intelligence agencies. The IAEA had the international standing to authenticate these sorts of intelligence reports for those who doubted their veracity. Given the recent memories about the faults in Western intelligence reports on the issue of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, the IAEA provided an internationally credible layer of verification about allegations being made about Iran (the IAEA had also expressed its view on Iraq's nuclear program, but was not involved in the other dimensions of its WMD efforts). When the IAEA said certain intelligence information was true, many more states were willing to accept it.

The Iranian materials displayed by Heinonen detailed how to design a warhead for the Shahab-3 missile, which had been operation in the Iranian armed forces since 2003. While the Iranian documents made no specific reference to a nuclear warhead, they did show the arc of a missile's flight, suggesting that its warhead had to be detonated at an altitude of 600 meters.

The IAEA experts knew fully well that a conventional explosion at that altitude would have no effect on the ground below. But 600 meters was the ideal altitude for a nuclear explosion over a city. As Sanger points out, it was in fact the height of the Hiroshima explosion. Despite the substance of his presentation, Heinonen did not yet say that the Iranians were producing nuclear weapons, but he left his audience in Vienna with many questions they had not asked before.<sup>2</sup>

The accumulating data on Iranian weaponization efforts further made the IAEA more determined to gain entry to suspected sites, especially Parchin. Indeed, the IAEA made a renewed effort to gain access to Parchin in February 2012. But the Iranians tied any inspection of Parchin to the conclusion of a broader agreement with the IAEA over all its suspicions about the military dimensions of their nuclear program. This was a sophisticated way of buying time while Tehran engaged in activities to sanitize the site and remove all suspicious evidence of illicit military activities.

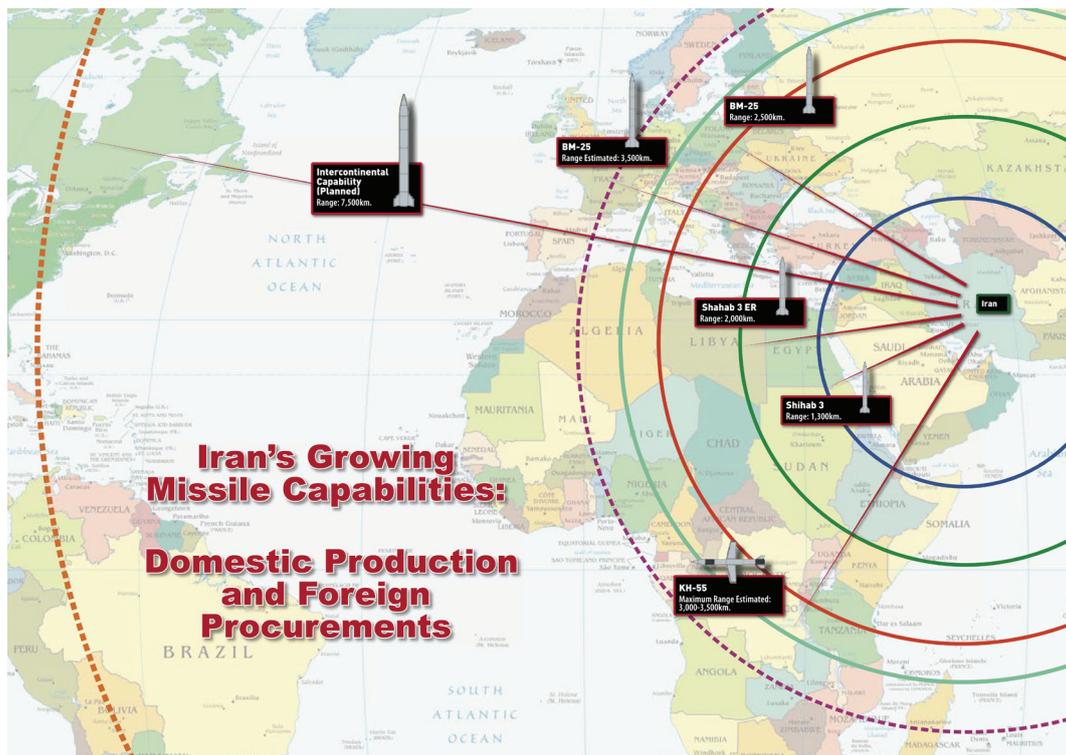
Thus one month after the IAEA request in February 2012 to gain entry to Parchin, Iranian clean-up activity began, which became evident in the months that followed through satellite imagery provided by the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS). This activity involved razing two buildings at Parchin, bulldozing the surrounding grounds and executing considerable earth removal. The interior of another building was also worked on without demolishing its exterior. Previous roadways were also dug up. This was presumably done to make sure that future soil samples, or other environmental testing, would not reveal the past presence of radioactive materials. In 2013, the IAEA additionally reported that Iran was covering significant parts of the Parchin site with asphalt: "Iran has conducted further spreading, leveling and compacting of material over most of the site, a significant proportion of which it has also asphalted."

In short, the Iranians completely altered the Parchin site. ISIS, which also made policy recommendations on the basis of the evidence it accumulated, proposed that unless Iran addressed the West's concerns about Iranian weaponization efforts, including its suspicions about the Parchin site, the IAEA

should refer the issue again to the UN Security Council to impose new sanctions on Iran. While Parchin has been a long term grievance of the IAEA towards Iran, the P-5+1 did not seize the opportunity of the Geneva negotiations to finally force Tehran to open up the site for inspections. Moreover, any clandestine weaponization activities could continue at Parchin or at any other Iranian facility without violating the terms of the Joint Plan of Action that the parties concluded at Geneva.<sup>3</sup>

## Delivery Systems: What about Iran’s Ballistic and Cruise Missile Programs?

The Joint Plan of Action did not address Iran’s delivery systems either. It might be asked why should delivery systems, like ballistic missiles have been part of the agenda at Geneva? There was an important precedent for this kind of demand by the P-5+1. At the end of the first Gulf War in 1991, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 687, which constituted the cease-fire that officially brought active combat operations to an end. The



Map on the ranges of Iranian missiles

resolution called for the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

But significantly, Resolution 687 called for dismantling all Iraqi missiles with a range over 150 kilometers, as well as its infrastructure for research, developments and production of such missiles. The reasoning for this stipulation was that Iraq was entitled to field ballistic missiles that would serve as artillery rockets supporting the Iraqi Army if it faced ground attack in the future. However, longer range missiles, such as those that struck at Israel and Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War were in a different category, since their primary use was to deliver weapons of mass destruction in the future.

Iran has made clear what the purpose is of its missile forces. For the last decade, Iran has paraded its Shahab-3 missiles in Tehran with signs that have been attached to the trailer which carries the Shahab-3. For example, in 2004, a year after the missile became operational, along the side of their missile trailer, the Iranians hung a highly visible yellow sign that read: "Israel must be wiped off the map." The sign was of course written in Farsi, but below this sentence, the Iranians included an English translation. While in the West there was a debate over whether this slogan actually called for Israel's elimination, the translation by the Iranian armed forces left no doubt.

By 2011, the Iranians shifted the sign from the side of the missile carrier to the front of the truck which towed it. And the sign that year read: "Israel must be destroyed." In 2013, Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, already attended the annual military parade in Tehran, where he spoke. Yet while Rouhani is associated in the minds of many observers in the West with a more moderate position, the Shahab-3 was again paraded. This time the sign at the front of the truck towing the missile read "Israel should cease to exist." The Iranian leadership left no doubt what is the purpose of these missiles, for they juxtaposed their true intentions with the main instrument they planned to use to carry them out.

The former head of Israeli military intelligence, Major General (ret.) Aharon Zeevi Farkash, took part in a round-table discussion at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs on the 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate, in which he revealed that Israel was monitoring Iranian missile exercises, from which they could extrapolate that the missiles were aimed at two targets, Riyadh and Tel Aviv. It appeared, then, that Iran literally meant what it was writing on its missile-carrying trailers, that its missiles were supposed to be used against Israel.<sup>4</sup>

The urgency for dealing with Iranian delivery systems did not just stem from the threat to Israel or to Saudi Arabia, as well. For in recent years, Iran was extending the range of its missile forces well beyond Israel. Speaking to members of the British parliament, Prime Minister David Cameron stated: “I don’t believe that an Iranian nuclear weapon is just a threat to Israel.” He explained that Iran was trying to build nuclear missiles capable of hitting London. His warning came after a briefing given to the British cabinet by the head of M-6, John Sawers. The basis of his assessment was the growing range of Iranian ballistic missiles. He explained that Iran was seeking to build an “intercontinental missile.”<sup>5</sup>

Iran’s general intention of developing a capability to strike Europe and not just its adversaries in the Middle East becomes evident when examining some of Iran’s recent procurement choices. For example, Iran acquired from North Korea eighteen BM-25 ground-launched mobile missiles, which came in several ranges varying from 2,500 kilometers up to 3,500 kilometers. If launched from Central Iran, the 3,500 kilometer version would definitely threaten Italy, France and Germany.

In addition, Iran managed to smuggle out of Ukraine a number of Russian Kh-55 cruise missiles, which also have a range of 3,500 kilometers. It is probable that these cruise missile were obtained for purposes of reverse engineering so that Iranian military industries could manufacture them by themselves. Whatever their ultimate purpose, the cruise missiles are yet another indicator of Iranian ambitions to acquire missile forces that will eventually put Western Europe at risk.<sup>6</sup>

In response to Iran’s growing capabilities with respect to Europe, the Bush administration started formal negotiations with Poland and the Czech Republic over the deployment of missile defense installations that were expected to become operational in 2018. The Obama administration cancelled the missile defense deployments in Eastern Europe, preferring a sea-based missile defense concept, nevertheless the missile defense proposals indicated that the US took seriously Iran’s ambitions to build missiles that could threaten Europe towards the end of this decade.

But Cameron warned of an Iranian intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capability as well. Iran has in fact been conducting successful launches of space-launch vehicles (SLV) since 2008, like the two-stage Safir missile. In 2010, Tehran unveiled a larger SLV, called the Simorgh. Iran’s determination to build more capable SLVs, with longer ranges, lead the U.S. National

Air and Space Intelligence Center to conclude that “Iran could develop an ICBM capable of reaching the United States by 2015.” Its 2013 report on this subject was prepared with the assistance of the Defense Intelligence Agency’s Missile and Space Intelligence Center and the Office of Naval Intelligence.<sup>7</sup>

There are of course more conservative estimates of when Iran might be able to deploy ICBMs, armed with nuclear warheads that can strike the United States. For example, Michael Elleman, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) who was also a former weapons inspector, has written that Iran could field a 5,000 kilometer missile by 2016. Such a missile would put the UK and all of Spain within the striking range of Iran. But he estimates that development of a 9,000 kilometer ICBM, that could hit the US, would take Iran a few more years until 2020. But these dates are still not far off when looking towards the future from 2014.<sup>8</sup>

## The Strategic Implications

The danger emanating from these growing Iranian missile capabilities, when twinned with the deployment of nuclear warheads, is not a bolt-out-of-blue nuclear attack on London, Paris, or Berlin, by the end of the decade. The immediate problem for the West will be the enormous strategic leverage these capabilities will give Iran in presenting itself as the protector of radical Islamic movements worldwide. Should Europe conclude that it needs to take harsh measure against terrorist organizations that are in its midst, Iran will undoubtedly declare that their rights need to be safeguarded and hint that it will take actions against those who act against them. Alternatively, should organizations like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) initiate operations against Spain and France, which it has declared as their targets in the past, Europe might conclude that it needs to undertake military operations as the French have done in the case of Mali.

If Russia and China, who have protected Iran in the UN Security Council, feel that they are immune to this problem, they are mistaken. There are those who argue that the radical Islamic insurgencies in the Caucuses or in Western China are Sunni and therefore will not receive this sort of strategic backing by Iran, which supports Shiite militias, like Hizbullah. But Iran has gone a long way to help Sunni movements over the years, like Hamas or al-Qaeda to which it gave sanctuary and operational assistance in the past. It is important to note that the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei,

---

What Was Left Out of Geneva: Weaponization and Missiles

has called himself in the past the “Supreme Leader of All Muslims,” indicating his self-image about his responsibility for what happens in the Sunni world as well. In the context of any kind of military escalation between the West or China and radical Islamist movements, a nuclear Iran will become a factor in their calculus of what they can do and how far they can go.

Will European states take the necessary actions to protect themselves at that point in time or will they be deterred from taking such actions? What will happen to the terrorist organizations themselves? Will they act more brazenly, knowing there is an Iranian nuclear umbrella under which they now operate? Terrorist organizations operating against India already have demonstrated that they are able to attack with a large degree of impunity because of Pakistan’s nuclear weapons. There is no reason why this cannot be replicated in the case of Iran. By correctly using their diplomatic leverage now to halt Iran’s weaponization and missile programs, the P-5+1 can avert the emergence of a far more dangerous strategic reality that will put their countries at risk in the not too distant future.

## Notes

1. Therese Delpeche, *Iran and the Bomb: The Abdication of International Responsibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp.125-126.
2. David Sanger, *The Inheritance: The World Obama Confronts and the Challenges to American Power* (New York: Harmony Books, 2009), pp. 86-94.
3. David Albright and Robert Avagyan, “Cleanup Activity at Suspected Parchin Test Site Appears Complete: Site Considerably Altered,” Institute for Science and International Security, August 1, 2012, <http://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/cleanup-activity-at-suspected-parchin-test-site-appears-complete-site-consi/>
4. <http://jcpa.org/article/the-u-s-national-intelligence-estimate-on-iran-and-its-aftermath-a-roundtable-of-israeli-experts-3/#sthash.oiqy5NAL.dpuf>
5. Jason Groves, “Iran Trying to Build Nuclear Missiles Capable of Hitting London, Cameron Warns MPs,” *Daily Mail* (UK), March 7, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2111307/Iran-trying-build-nuclear-missiles-capable-hitting-London-Cameron-warns-MPs.html#ixzz2oOsD9rbr>
6. Uzi Rubin, “The Global Range of Iran’s Ballistic Missile Program,” in Dan Diker (ed.), *Iran’s Race for Regional Supremacy: Strategic Implications for the Middle East* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2008).
7. *Ballistic & Cruise Missile Threat* (Washington: National Air and Space Intelligence Center, 2013).
8. Michael Elleman, “Iran’s Ballistic Missile Program,” in *The Iran Primer*, U.S. Institute for Peace, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/irans-ballistic-missile-program>

**Join the Initiative**

[www.friendsofisraelinitiative.org](http://www.friendsofisraelinitiative.org)  
[info@friendsofisraelinitiative.org](mailto:info@friendsofisraelinitiative.org)

**On social networks**

Facebook: Friends of Israel Initiative  
Twitter: @Friendsisrael