



The Iranian Ballistic Missile Threat And a “Phased, Adaptive Approach” to Missile Defense for Europe

by John D. Johnson

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Iran's position in the Middle East is unique. Iran is a Persian country surrounded by Arabs and other non-Persian ethnic groups. Iran is a Shia Muslim country surrounded by mostly Sunni Muslims and some Christians. It sees the presence of Western militaries in neighboring countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. As such, Iran perceives an existential threat. Feeling threatened, Iran continues to develop offensive and defensive military capabilities including long-range ballistic missiles and proxy groups, and probably views a nuclear-armed ballistic missile as a credible deterrent against an external attack.

The threats posed by Iran's ballistic missiles and the nexus of Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs are of great concern to the U.S., NATO, and the international community. While Iran claims its missiles are defensive in nature and its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, insufficient cooperation and transparency on Iran's part leaves these claims open to serious debate.

Given Iran's military capabilities and ambiguous intent, the international community has gone to great lengths to engage Iran diplomatically. The U.S., NATO members and Middle Eastern countries have also engaged in threat mitigation activities including non-proliferation efforts, economic sanctions and the deployment of missile defense systems.

In September 2009, President Barack Obama announced a new U.S. missile defense policy for Europe called the Phased Adaptive Approach (PAA). The new U.S. approach is largely based upon the growing threat posed by Iran's ballistic missile capability.

At the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, NATO will consider the Iranian ballistic missile threat and decide whether to make missile defense of Alliance territory a NATO mission.

This article examines NATO and U.S. perspectives of the threat posed by Iran's ballistic missiles, reviews missile defense policies, and makes recommendations related to NATO missile defense policy as follows:

- NATO should make missile defense a NATO mission at its November Summit.
- NATO should merge the U.S. PAA capabilities with NATO's Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence (ALTBMD) capabilities to create one overarching NATO missile defense shield.
- NATO members should agree to provide funding and to make national contributions to the overall missile defense shield (e.g., Aegis-capable ships and the purchase of SM-3 missiles for those ships).

- NATO should increase cooperation with Russia on missile defense, particularly where PAA plans are being laid to place future missile defense infrastructure in Eastern Europe.
- NATO should intensify nuclear and missile nonproliferation strategies vis-à-vis Iran; the U.S. and NATO must engage countries such as Russia, Turkey, China and India to find common ground on the implementation of UNSC sanctions.

This article first looks at perspectives of the Iranian ballistic missile threat, followed by a review of NATO and U.S. missile defense policy for Europe, and concludes with several analytical findings.¹

NATO Perspective of the Iran Ballistic Missile Threat

A review of NATO documents and the statements by senior NATO officials indicate that, despite some differences among member states, NATO generally views Iran's ballistic missile program as a significant and growing threat.

The April 2009 Summit Declaration issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Strasbourg/Kehl is representative of other NATO official documents in terms of how the Alliance views the threat. The declaration states, "Ballistic missile proliferation poses an increasing threat to Allies' forces, territory, and populations."² With specific regard to the threat from Iran, the declaration later reads, "We remain deeply concerned about the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile programmes, and related proliferation risks and call on Iran to comply with relevant UNSCRs."³

The May 2010 NATO Group of Experts report on a new Strategic Concept for NATO stated that, "Defending against the threat of a possible ballistic missile attack from Iran has given birth to what has become, for NATO, an essential military mission."⁴ The report's strongly worded assessment further characterized the threat posed by the confluence of Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs in Article 5 terms saying, "Iran's efforts to enrich nuclear fuel, develop nuclear weapons designs, and stockpile long-range ballistic missiles could create a major Article 5 threat to the Alliance in this decade."⁵

In a speech in May 2010 at Bucharest University, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen echoed the sentiments of the Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration and the NATO Group of Experts' report when he spoke to both the policy aspects of the Iranian threat and to some of the technical aspects of Iran's ballistic missile capability and how it threatens Alliance members directly.

A look at current trends shows that the proliferation threat is real and growing -- over 30 countries have or are developing missile capabilities, with greater and greater ranges. In many cases, these missiles could eventually threaten our populations and territories. And several countries are seeking nuclear weapons. This is deadly

¹ The information presented also includes general perspectives obtained during the author's meetings from September 7-10, 2010 with U.S. and NATO representatives at U.S. European Command (Stuttgart, Germany), U.S. Army Europe (Heidelberg, Germany), and NATO Headquarters (Brussels, Belgium).

² NATO, Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration, April 4, 2009, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm, para. 50.

³ Ibid, para. 56.

⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement, Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO, May 17, 2010, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_63654.htm, 11.

⁵ Ibid, 16.

combination. Iran is a case in point. Tehran is pursuing its nuclear activities in defiance of several UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. And in parallel with these nuclear programmes, Iran also runs an extensive missile development programme. Statements from Iranian officials declare the range of their Shahab-3 missiles to be 2,000 kilometres. That will already put Allied countries within reach: Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania.⁶

Despite widespread agreement among Allies on the threat, there are some differences in the way in which individual NATO countries perceive the Iranian threat. For example, Turkey's perception of the threat posed by Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs is very different from the perception contained in official NATO documents and from the perception held by the majority of the NATO Allies. Three recent developments provide insight into Turkey's overall attitude toward Iran and show that Turkey views Iran more as a partner to be engaged with than as a threat.

First, in May 2010, Turkey, working with Brazil, signed an agreement with Iran whereby Iran could ship 1,200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium to Turkey for safekeeping in exchange for fuel rods enriched to a higher level of 20 percent, for use in a medical research reactor.⁷ Further indicating a split with NATO Allies on Iran's nuclear program, during the agreement's announcement, Turkey's and Brazil's Foreign Ministers condemned any new sanctions against Iran and said Iran has a right to a "full nuclear fuel cycle, including enrichment."⁸

Second, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has argued that Iran's nuclear program is for peaceful purposes saying, "Iran does not accept it is building a weapon. They are working on nuclear power for the purposes of energy only."⁹ Further, when the fourth round of UNSC sanctions against Iran was introduced in June 2010, Turkey, a non-permanent Security Council member, voted against the measure. However, Turkey has said it will enforce UNSC sanctions against Iran.

Third, Turkey has significant economic and energy ties with Iran, a trend that runs counter to that of other NATO Allies. According to a February 2010 Brookings Institution report, "The total trade volume between the two countries is \$10 billion and expected to double in the next three years -- given Turkey's growing need for natural gas and willingness to lessen its dependence on Russia. As a result, Turkey will resist Western efforts to tighten economic sanctions against Tehran."¹⁰

While Turkey's threat perception is very different from what it agreed to in Alliance consensus documents, as it relates to the Alliance's missile defense plans, Turkey has given no indication that it will resist U.S. and NATO Secretary General efforts to make missile defense a NATO mission.

⁶ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO Secretary-General Speech at the Bucharest University, May 7, 2010, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_63307.htm.

⁷ Marc Champion and Joe Parkinson, "Iran Says It Is Ready for Talks on Nuclear Fuel-Swap," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 26, 2010, http://online.wsj.com/article/NA_WSJ_PUB:SB40001424052748703995104575388653340954196.html.

⁸ Thomas Erdbrink, "Iran to Ship Uranium to Turkey in Nuclear Deal," *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/17/AR2010051700105.htm>.

⁹ Robert Tait, "Iran is Our Friend says Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan," *The Guardian* (UK), October 26, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/oct/26/turkey-iran1>.

¹⁰ Omer Taspinar, "Iran and Turkish-American Relations," Brookings Institution, February 10, 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2010/0201_turkey_iran_taspinar.aspx.

U.S. Perspective of Iranian Ballistic Missile Threat

President Obama's remarks and statements by other senior U.S. government officials reflect how the U.S. perceives the threat from Iran. In addition, a review which follows of official U.S. government documents including the Department of Defense's 2010 Ballistic Missile Defense Review (BMDR) Report and the National Air and Space Intelligence Center (NASIC) 2009 Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat report provides greater detail on how the U.S. views the nature of the Iranian ballistic missile threat.

In September 2009 when President Obama announced plans to strengthen U.S. missile defense in Europe, he spoke about the threat posed by Iranian ballistic missiles. He said, "First, we have updated our intelligence assessment of Iran's missile programs, which emphasizes the threat posed by Iran's short- and medium- range missiles, which are capable of reaching Europe."¹¹

In an October 2009 speech to NATO's Defense Ministers, U.S. Ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daalder, echoed President Obama's comments regarding the Iranian short- and medium-range missile threat and also addressed U.S. concerns about Iran's longer-range missiles and its nuclear program. Ambassador Daalder stated, "We now know that Iran already has hundreds of ballistic missiles that can threaten its neighbors, and it is actively developing and testing ballistic missiles that can strike farther into Europe. We also know that Iran is -- at a minimum -- keeping the option of developing nuclear weapons, as well as longer-range delivery systems."¹²

Statements by two U.S. military leaders provide additional insights into the threat posed specifically by Iran's intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) program. In March 2009, then-director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Lieutenant General Michael Maples, told the Senate Armed Services Committee, "Iran's 2 February 2009 launch of the Safir Space Launch Vehicle [SLV] shows progress in some technologies relevant to ICBMs."¹³ In March 2009, then-commander of U.S. European Command, General Bantz Craddock, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee saying, "By 2015 Iran may also deploy an ICBM capable of reaching all of Europe and parts of the U.S."¹⁴

From March 2009 through January 2010, the Department of Defense conducted the first-ever BMDR. The congressionally mandated review considered U.S. policies, plans and programs, and begins with an overview of the ballistic missile threat to the U.S. and its allies.¹⁵ The BMDR asserts that Iran's ballistic missile program presents both a regional threat and a potential threat to the U.S. homeland.

According to the BMDR, Iran is developing and testing missiles with the capability to reach Europe. Short- and medium-range missiles in Iran's inventory include the Shahab-1 (300 km range), Shahab-2 (500 km), Shahab-3 (1,300 km), the new solid-propellant MRBM (2,000 km) and the Shahab-3 variant (2,000 km). The ranges given are estimates and are, in part, based upon the statements of Iranian officials. If these range estimates are accurate, the Shahab-3

¹¹ The White House, Remarks by the President on Strengthening Missile Defense in Europe, September 17, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-Strengthening-Missile-Defense-in-Europe/.

¹² Ivo Daalder, "New Nuclear Disarmament Proposals: Implications for NATO and Transatlantic Relations," U.S. Mission to NATO: Defense Ministers Meeting in Bratislava, Ambassador Daalder's Speech, October 23, 2009, <http://nato.usmission.gov/Texts/Daalder10222009.asp>.

¹³ Lieutenant General Michael D. Maples, Director Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Annual Threat Assessment, Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 10, 2009.

¹⁴ General Bantz J. Craddock, Commander, U.S. European Command (EUCOM), Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 24, 2009.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, 2010 Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report Fact Sheet, March 3, 2010.

missile could reach Turkey, and the solid-propellant MRBM and Shahab-3 variant (also called the Ghadr-1) could travel as far as Greece, Bulgaria and Romania in southeastern Europe.¹⁶

The BMDR also states Iran continues to develop long-range missiles that could threaten the U.S. However, it concludes that there is some uncertainty as to when Iran's ICBM capability will mature.¹⁷ While Iran has not stated its intent to develop ICBMs, two recent launches of SLVs indicate Iran is pursuing longer range missiles. According to the BMDR, in August 2008, Iran launched its Safir SLV with what it claims was a dummy satellite. In February 2009, Iran used the Safir-2 SLV to place the domestically produced Omid satellite in orbit.¹⁸

The U.S. NASIC's April 2009 Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat report provides additional details and analysis on the Iranian ballistic missile threat. While they are not capable of reaching Europe due to range limitations, NASIC identifies Iran's four short-range ballistic missiles and their approximate ranges. These include the Fateh-110 (190 km), Shahab-I (300 km), Shahab-II (500 km) and CSS-8 (150 km). These short-range missiles could reach Turkey and U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. In total, NASIC assesses that Iran has fewer than 100 short-range ballistic missile launchers, but notes that the actual missile inventories could be larger, because launchers can be reused to fire multiple missiles.¹⁹

Regarding Iran's medium-range ballistic missiles, whose ranges make them capable of reaching NATO members Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, NASIC's assessment is in line with that of the BMDR that Iran has made efforts to extend the range of its missiles by modifying the Shahab-3 and by testing a new solid-propellant MRBM. NASIC also provides additional details on its estimate of the number of launchers in Iran's inventory. This includes fewer than 50 launchers for all Shahab-3 variants (the Shahab-3 with a range of 1,290 km, and the Shahab-3 variant with a range of approximately 1,900 km), although there may be several missiles available for each launcher. For the new Iranian MRBM and ICBM, NASIC assesses that the number of launchers as being either "not yet deployed" or "undetermined."²⁰

Like the BMDR, the NASIC report notes Iran's SLV launches in 2008 and 2009 and assesses that these launches can serve as a test bed to further Iran's long-range ballistic missile efforts. Additionally, the report states that, "with sufficient foreign assistance, Iran could develop and test an ICBM capable of reaching the United States by 2015."²¹

NATO Missile Defense Policy

There are three components of NATO's missile defense policy. First, the ALTBMD program, which was established in September 2005, is aimed at protecting deployed Alliance forces (i.e., Theater Missile Defense (TMD)) from short- and medium-range ballistic missiles. The ALTBMD is focused on integrating NATO's command and control systems and communication network to enable the exchange of information between NATO and national missile defense systems. Second, in April 2009, Allies directed that work be done to prepare options for a comprehensive missile defense of all Allied territory. These options are to be considered at the NATO Summit in November 2010. Finally, under the auspices of the NATO-

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, 2010 Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report, February 1, 2010, 5.

¹⁷ Ibid, iii.

¹⁸ Ibid, 4.

¹⁹ National Air and Space Intelligence Center, "Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat," April 2009, 12-13.

²⁰ Ibid, 15-17.

²¹ Ibid, 3.

Russia Council (NRC), NATO is engaged in TMD cooperation with Russia. Under the NRC TMD project, multiple computer assisted exercises have been held since 2003.²²

Several key documents provide the framework for NATO's policy and activities related to TMD and missile defense. NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept initially recognized the need for TMD citing the "...the risks and potential threats of the proliferation of NBC weapons and their means of delivery..."²³ At that time, NATO's focus was on TMD, which is intended to protect troops operating in the field. After the U.S. withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which limited U.S. missile defense to a single site, in 2002 the U.S. and NATO started to consider the feasibility for missile defense of NATO territory.²⁴ The shift in 2002 toward a possible NATO missile defense mission represented a considerable expansion to the protection previously envisioned under the TMD concept.

In 2002 at the Prague Summit, Allies "...initiated a new NATO Missile Defence Feasibility Study to examine options for protecting Alliance territory, forces and population centres against the full range of missile threats..."²⁵ In November 2006 at the Riga Summit, NATO concluded that missile defense is technically feasible and directed that additional work be done to determine the political and military implications of missile defense and also directed that a threat assessment be updated.²⁶ In April 2008, NATO's Bucharest Summit Declaration acknowledged that ballistic missile proliferation posed an increasing threat to Allies' forces, territory and populations and specifically referenced Iran's ballistic missile program; recognized the planned deployment of U.S. missile defense assets to Europe; and emphasized the importance of NATO-Russia missile defense cooperation.²⁷ In April 2009, Allies reaffirmed many previously agreed-to missile defense conclusions and directed that work be done to look at options for possibly expanding the role of NATO's ALTBMD beyond protecting deployed forces, to include also the protection NATO territory.²⁸ In December 2009, Allies welcomed the U.S. PAA for missile defense in Europe and said that if NATO decides to take missile defense of NATO territory on as a mission, then the PAA would be a valuable national contribution to NATO's capability and to Alliance security.²⁹

Finally, looking forward to the costs of a broader NATO missile defense mission, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen said in May 2010 that the cost of missile defense for NATO territory would be less than 200 million Euros (\$250 million) over ten years. However, that number has received some skepticism as being too low, and funding is a factor that could impact Allied support of the missile defense mission at the Lisbon Summit in November and beyond.³⁰

²² NATO, Missile Defense Programme Overview, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49635.htm.

²³ NATO, The Alliance's Strategic Concept, April 24, 1999, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_27433.htm, para. 56.

²⁴ David S. Yost, "NATO's Evolving Purposes and the Next Strategic Concept," *International Affairs*, Volume 86, Issue 2, March 10, 2010, 508.

²⁵ NATO, Prague Summit Declaration, November 21, 2002, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_19552.htm, para. 4g.

²⁶ NATO, Riga Summit Declaration, November 29, 2006, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_37920.htm, para. 25.

²⁷ NATO, Bucharest Summit Declaration, April 3, 2008, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm, paras. 28-29, 37-38, 41.

²⁸ NATO, Strasbourg / Kehl Summit Declaration, paras. 50-54.

²⁹ NATO, Final Statement, Foreign Ministers Meeting, Brussels, paras. 14-16.

³⁰ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO Secretary General Monthly Press Briefing, May 5, 2010, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_63153.htm.

For example, in March 2010, France's Foreign Minister expressed doubts about the potential NATO missile defense mission and cited tightening defense budgets as a principal reason.³¹

U.S. Missile Defense Policy: A “Phased, Adaptive Approach” for Europe

In September 2009, President Obama announced a new missile defense policy for Europe. Based upon a comprehensive review of U.S. missile defense plans for Europe and the recommendations of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff, the new U.S. policy is guided by two main factors. First, it is based on an updated threat assessment, which emphasizes the threat posed by Iran's short- and medium-range ballistic missiles rather than the threat from ICBMs. Second, it is based on advances in missile defense technology, particularly sea- and land-based interceptors and the sensors that support them. The PAA missile defense policy for Europe calls for the following:

- Phase One (in the 2011 timeframe) – Deploy current and proven missile defense systems available in the next two years, including the sea-based Aegis Weapon System, the SM-3 interceptor (Block IA), and sensors such as the forward-based Army Navy/Transportable Radar Surveillance system (AN/TPY-2), to address regional ballistic missile threats to Europe and our deployed personnel and their families;
- Phase Two (in the 2015 timeframe) – After appropriate testing, deploy a more capable version of the SM-3 interceptor (Block IB) in both sea- and land-based configurations, and more advanced sensors, to expand the defended area against short- and medium-range missile threats;
- Phase Three (in the 2018 timeframe) – After development and testing are complete, deploy the more advanced SM-3 Block IIA variant currently under development, to counter short-, medium-, and intermediate-range missile threats; and
- Phase Four (in the 2020 timeframe) – After development and testing are complete, deploy the SM-3 Block IIB to help better cope with medium- and intermediate-range missiles and the potential future ICBM threat to the United States.³²

In announcing the PAA, the President emphasized that the new approach is consistent with NATO missile defense efforts, and that he would welcome Russian cooperation to bring their missile defense capabilities into a broader defense of common interests. The President also alluded to the adaptable nature of the PAA saying, “Going forward...we will rigorously evaluate both the threat posed by ballistic missiles and the technology that we are developing to counter it.”³³

³¹ David Brunnstrom, “NATO Says Missile Defense Cost Small Price to Pay,” *Reuters*, May 5, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6443LP20100505>.

³² The White House, Fact Sheet on U.S. Missile Defense Policy A ‘Phased, Adaptive Approach’ for Missile Defense in Europe, September 17, 2009, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/FACT-SHEET-US-Missile-Defense-Policy-A-Phased-Adaptive-Approach-for-Missile-Defense-in-Europe/.

³³ The White House, Remarks by the President on Strengthening Missile Defense in Europe.

Missile Defense Plans Sufficient Against Iranian MRBMs; Uncertain Against ICBMs³⁴

From a technical capabilities standpoint, at the present time and for the next 2-3 years, the greatest Iranian ballistic missile threat to Europe is from Iran's Ghadr-1 (Shahab-3 variant) MRBM with a range of approximately 2,000 km. The Ghadr-1 could reach southeastern Europe including parts of Greece, Bulgaria and Romania.

If deployed in sufficient numbers, the sea-based Aegis Weapon System, the SM-3 interceptor (Block IA) and associated sensors as called for in Phase One (2011) of the PAA are sufficient to defend against an MRBM attack from Iran. A combination of Aegis patrols in the Mediterranean and Black Sea would provide optimal Aegis BMD coverage for southeastern Europe. Operationally however, a U.S. BMD employment strategy that relies heavily on the Black Sea could meet with Russian opposition due, in part, to the presence of Russia's Black Sea Fleet and its base in Sevastopol. Russia views the Black Sea as being within its sphere of influence. A sub-optimal, but acceptable Aegis BMD deployment would be patrols based solely in the Mediterranean Sea.

Phases Two and Three of the PAA call for the deployment of the more capable land-based SM-3 interceptors in Eastern Europe (likely in Romania and Poland). Of significance, the land-based SM-3 capabilities planned for Phase Two (in the 2015 timeframe) will render unnecessary the potentially contentious Black Sea Aegis BMD patrols.

Regarding the Iranian ICBM threat, assessments vary regarding Iran's ICBM development timeline. While multiple credible assessments state Iran could develop an ICBM by 2015, others say it could be 2020 before Iran develops an ICBM capability. If intelligence assessments are correct and Iran develops an ICBM by 2015, U.S. and NATO missile defense plans for Europe would not, under the current phased approach, be sufficient to defend against an ICBM attack from Iran for the 2015-2020 timeframe. This is due to the fact that the PAA does not deploy an anti-ICBM capable system (the SM-3 Block IIB) until Phase Four in the 2020 timeframe.

However, there are a number of technical and scientific steps that Iran would need to take prior to achieving an ICBM capability. These steps include the development of advanced and larger rocket motors; improved flight control, guidance systems, and telemetry; reentry vehicle heat protection; and a series of flight tests over several years.³⁵ Given the visibility of these steps -- particularly flight tests -- and heightened intelligence collection against Iran, it is likely the U.S. will be able to refine the timeframe for when Iran will develop an ICBM capability and adjust its missile defenses and other options accordingly.

Recommendations: The U.S. and NATO Allies should sustain robust intelligence collection on Iranian long-range missile development to detect Iranian progress. Additionally, NATO should adopt the missile defense mission and merge U.S. PAA missile defense plans into the broader NATO missile shield. Finally, in order to extend Iranian ballistic missile development timelines, the U.S. and NATO should increase efforts to strengthen international missile non-proliferation initiatives, which currently consist of the Missile Technology Control

³⁴ These findings are drawn from a larger study on this topic, which is available from the author upon request. Contact e-mail: john.d.johnson2@us.army.mil.

³⁵ EastWest Institute, "Iran's Nuclear and Missile Proliferation, A Joint Threat Assessment by U.S. and Russian Technical Experts," May 2009, <http://www.ewi.info/groundbreaking-us-russia-joint-threat-assessment-iran-0>, 9.

Regime (MTCR), The Hague Code of Conduct (HCOC) and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

Iranian Ballistic Missile Capability Clear; Intent Mixed

While Iran clearly has short- and medium-range ballistic missile capabilities and is working toward developing longer range ballistic missiles, Iranian leaders have given no indicator of any intention to attack Europe, and such an attack is highly unlikely. Iranian leaders have emphasized that their ballistic missile forces are for defensive purposes. Iran views regime survival as paramount, and likely realizes that NATO retaliation for an Iranian missile attack on a NATO ally would seriously jeopardize the regime. An assumption is that Iran sees an increasingly capable U.S. and NATO missile defense system for Europe, which would deter an Iranian attack since Iran could expect only a small probability of success against a high probability of retaliation.

Iran views its own ballistic missile capability as a symbol of prestige in the Middle East. Based on perceived past ballistic missiles successes during the Iran-Iraq War and the Persian Gulf War, Iran also sees its ballistic missile capability as a means to intimidate its neighbors and as an asymmetric weapon to compensate for weak conventional forces.

In a larger sense, Iran sees its position in the Middle East as being bolstered by the removal of longtime antagonist Saddam Hussein in Iraq and of the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, Iran feels pressured by the deployment of U.S. forces so near its borders and has become even more intransigent in dealing with the West in general, and on its missile and nuclear programs in particular. Additionally, Iran's lack of transparency, misleading statements, and tendency to exaggerate its capabilities makes assessments of Iranian ballistic missile capabilities and intent difficult.³⁶ Meanwhile, the uncertainty surrounding the military dimension of Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs continues to engender diplomatic pressure on Iran, rigorous intelligence collection of Iranian capabilities and intent, and missile defense deployments to protect against a potential Iranian attack.

Iran's intent is even less certain when it comes to Israel. Regarding Israel, there is a threat. Iranian leaders have made threatening statements toward Israel in the past, and Iran's support to anti-Israeli militant groups is well established. As such, many Israelis fear that Iran has the capability and intent to attack Israel. However, analysts consider that Iran's ballistic missiles, lacking modern guidance systems, may not be accurate. Despite public statements to the contrary, Iranian leaders probably understand their ballistic missile accuracy limitations. That fact, combined with Iranian concerns over potential collateral damage to Muslim holy sites in Israel, would probably enter into their calculus of whether to use a ballistic missile (nuclear or conventional) against Israel.

Recommendations: The U.S. and NATO should work closely with Turkey, Russia, China and India to find common ground on an approach to the sanctions implementation against Iran for them to be effective. The current strategy of economic sanctions against Iran to pressure the regime for greater transparency and cooperation in their nuclear and ballistic missile programs can work if given time and if sanctions are adhered to. However, as it stands, the desired impact of sanctions is lessened by Iran's dealings with countries such as Turkey, Russia, China and India whose policies differ from the U.S. in terms of sanctions implementation. The

³⁶ John Chipman, "Iran's Ballistic Missile Capabilities: A Net Assessment," Press Statement, International Institute for Strategic Studies, May 10, 2010, 2.

U.S. also should intensify cooperation with Israel on intelligence exchanges, threat assessments and operational planning.

Iranian Ballistic Missiles Part of Larger Threat

Iran's ballistic missiles, along with Iranian proxy groups, are tools for Iran to project power beyond its borders and exert influence in the region. The fact that Iran's ballistic missile program has the technical capability to threaten southeastern Europe and the Middle East is only part of a larger threat posed by Iran. It is the combination of Iran's ballistic missile capability with a potential nuclear warhead that is the larger concern. Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair's remarks in February 2010 about Iran's nuclear program are worth repeating. He said, "We continue to assess Iran is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons in part by developing various nuclear capabilities that bring it closer to being able to produce such weapons, should it choose to do so. We do not know, however, if Iran will eventually decide to build nuclear weapons."³⁷

The issue of the possible threat to attack Europe aside, the larger threat from Iran from the U.S. perspective is the destabilizing influence that a nuclear-armed Iran would have in the Middle East, and potentially globally. Negative repercussions of a nuclear-armed Iran could include: greater perceived insecurity in the Middle East resulting in higher oil prices; the potential for a nuclear arms race in the Middle East whereby other countries initiate nuclear programs to counter-balance Iran's capability; and the potential that Iran as a nuclear power might share either nuclear materials or nuclear know-how with surrogates or other rogue actors.

Recommendations: The U.S., NATO and Middle Eastern allies should increase cooperation to develop joint threat assessments of Iran's capabilities and intent and should coordinate joint responses to Iranian sanctions violations and to a potential Iranian withdrawal from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

NATO Will Likely Agree to Missile Defense Mission

NATO will probably agree to make missile defense a NATO mission at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010. However, there are several factors which could inhibit this decision including differences between agreed NATO threat perceptions and views of individual Allies vis-à-vis Iran, and missile defense funding.

First, while NATO consensus documents in the past have noted concern with Iran's nuclear and missile programs, not all NATO members agree fully that Iran poses a direct threat to Europe. Turkey is the obvious example. Turkey's threat perception is different from NATO's perception and Turkey's resultant policy stance toward Iran is much more cordial than that of NATO writ large. If the NATO Summit dialogue surrounding the missile defense mission is more general, rather than specifically directed at Iran, then Turkey would be more likely to support it. On the other hand, a missile defense approach focused on Iran could inhibit Turkey's support.

Eastern European and Baltic NATO members probably will not balk at a missile defense mission directed at Iran, but will stress their concern about Russia.

³⁷ Dennis C. Blair, Director of National Intelligence, Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 2, 2010, 13.

Finally, while unlikely, funding could be a factor which inhibits agreement on the missile defense mission. Certainly it will be a topic of discussion given the current economic environment.

If NATO decides to make missile defense a NATO mission, it will probably result in NATO's current ALTBMD TMD mission being combined with the U.S. PAA plans in order to cover the larger NATO territorial defense mission. However, the NATO decision probably will not result in a significant change in NATO missile defense assets and capabilities. The trend among European allies is to decrease overall defense budgets so a large increase in NATO defense expenditures to support missile defense-related costs is unlikely and is probably unnecessary given redundancies it could create with planned U.S. PAA capabilities.

An issue likely to arise during NATO missile defense discussions is what national contributions Allies will make to the new missile defense mission. The PAA's demands for Aegis BMD ships will probably strain the U.S. Navy's ability to provide BMD coverage for U.S. Combatant Commanders worldwide until the number of BMD-capable ships is increased. European Allies have sea-based BMD capabilities and those assets could lessen the strain on U.S. Navy ships where demand exceeds supply.

Recommendations: Careful analysis is required to determine where and how Allies' national missile defense assets can be incorporated into the larger NATO missile defense shield and where efficiencies are achievable in terms of using Allied systems in lieu of U.S. systems or vice versa.

Russia: Angst over Missile Defense, Possible Key to Iran

The previous U.S. administration's missile defense plan for Europe caused great angst in Russia because it called for the deployment of a radar capability in Eastern Europe that would have had the capability to monitor Russian ICBMs. Russia also felt the previous plan was announced unilaterally rather than in a coordinated, bilateral or multilateral way. Further, Russia viewed the previous plan as an initial capability that would have paved the way for further U.S. expansion of missile assets in Eastern Europe and worldwide. Russia seems slightly more at ease with the new PAA for Europe. The PAA's approach is different from the previous plan in that it focuses initially on the threat posed by Iran's short- and medium-range ballistic missiles. Not until Phase Four would the PAA counter ICBMs. However, recent U.S. agreements with Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic to place PAA missile defense capabilities in their countries in future PAA phases will likely create additional tension with Russia. This point of tension probably will occur at some point in the future but prior to the actual deployment of these capabilities.

Taken together, U.S. missile defense plans for Eastern Europe, NATO expansion into Eastern Europe and the Baltic Region, and the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty all have contributed to Russian threat perceptions as articulated in Russian's 2010 Military Doctrine.

Recommendations: The U.S. and NATO should intensify efforts to increase cooperation with Russia on missile defense and on Iran more generally. In fact, the analysis suggests that U.S. engagement with Russia on the larger Iranian issue is key to a true breakthrough with Iran due to political, security and especially economic ties that Russia has to Iran and the leverage that gives to them.

Conclusion

Iran's ballistic missile program is a growing threat to regional and international security. The U.S. PAA represents a missile defense compromise that accepts some near-to-mid-term risk in the event Iran develops an ICBM by 2015, but it may avoid hard-line Russian resistance. At the same time, the PAA reassures U.S. Allies by making substantial U.S. contributions to missile defense which will provide for their protection. With the goal being improved regional and international security, NATO should accept the missile defense mission at its Summit in November 2010, incorporate the U.S. PAA plan into a larger NATO missile defense umbrella, and actively engage Russia on missile defense cooperation and policy vis-à-vis Iran more broadly.

Lieutenant Colonel John D. Johnson is a U.S. Army Senior Fellow assigned to the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. He holds a B.A. Degree in Business Finance from Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, a M.A. Degree in International Relations from Alliant International University, San Diego, California, and a M.M.A.S. Degree in Strategy from the U.S. Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. LTC Johnson has served in a variety of command and staff positions with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Department of the Army Staff, U.S. Army Europe, Multi-National Forces-Iraq (Baghdad), III Corps, U.S. Division South-Iraq (Basra), 1st Infantry Division, 1st Cavalry Division, and 501st Military Intelligence Brigade.

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those exclusively of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, the College of International Security Studies, the United States European Command, the United States Army, the Department of Defense, or any other governmental agency.

This is a single article excerpt of material published in [Small Wars Journal](#).
Published by and COPYRIGHT © 2010, Small Wars Foundation.

Permission is granted to print single copies for personal, non-commercial use. Select non-commercial use is licensed via a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license per our [Terms of Use](#).

No FACTUAL STATEMENT should be relied upon without further investigation on your part sufficient to satisfy you in your independent judgment that it is true.



Please consider [supporting Small Wars Journal](#).