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Iran's Ballistic Missile Program:

From Coercive Diplomacy to Missile Diplomacy

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Abstract

Iran's ballistic missile program can be considered an integral part of its nuclear strategy, because ballistic missiles are capable of carrying multiple warheads. This is why the Iranian missile issue is considered one of the most prominent international issues that can destabilize the region and the world. Consequently, the international community, led by the US, has been trying to reduce this risk since the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) through a policy of coercive diplomacy. This paper is an attempt to assess the level of effectiveness of coercive diplomacy in resolving the Iranian missile case from the signing of the JCPOA deal in July 2015 until July 2023. It indicates that the policy has not been highly successful in achieving its aims, and Iran has continued its efforts to increase its missile capabilities, pursuing missile diplomacy in order to achieve its regional and international goals. This study employs a qualitative methodology. The findings highlight that coercive diplomacy fails to compel Iran to abandon its missile program and, instead, incentivizes Iran to further develop its missile capabilities.

Keywords: ballistic missile program, coercive diplomacy, Iran, missile diplomacy, nuclear program

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Introduction

The Middle East is a crucial geostrategic region at the intersection of three continents, and its stability and security directly affects the prosperity of the entire world. However, Iran's ambition for nuclear development is one of the most threatening issues that has affected the region's security and stability on one side and provided Iran with a delivery capability for nuclear weapons on the other. For Iran, the importance of the ballistic missile program is in line with the nuclear program, because the acquisition of missiles will facilitate and accelerate the process of acquiring nuclear capabilities. Even though the JCPOA agreement between Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the US, the UK, and Germany) has been in effect since July 14, 2015, it has resulted in a regional lull in both parties' relations, particularly after the international community assuaged Iran's deep fears of imminent attacks. Coercive diplomacy is a moderate approach pursued by the P5+1 in order to force Iran to give up its nuclear and missile programs, but after the US reneged on the negotiations in 2018, it became increasingly obvious that coercive diplomacy was not achieving the intended policy goals in curbing Iran's missile activities. In response to the failure of coercive diplomacy, Iran's foreign policy turned to relying on missile diplomacy.

The diplomatic impasse paves the way for Iran to increase its missile capacity and use missile diplomacy as a balancing message toward its archenemies. In general, it is notoriously difficult to predict Iran's capacity for ballistic missiles, because a ballistic missile program is an inherently complicated technical undertaking. Iran, through bombarding different countries, attempts to send blatant messages to the international community, and it practices this type of diplomacy as an important part of its foreign policy to achieve its goals in an efficient way.

Apart from coercive diplomacy, there are several policy tools to address the Iranian missile threat, as Robert Jervis observed in his 2013 article "Getting to yes with Iran: the challenges of coercive diplomacy". Such options include private threats, increasing US threats, removing sanctions, and accepting a limited Iranian enrichment of uranium. However, this paper refrains from discussing these tools in detail because they fall outside the scope of this study.

Research on Iran's missile program holds significant importance in the fields of international relations and security studies. There is still a lack of comprehensive studies on this topic, indicating the need for further research. The significance of investigating this subject is heightened by the fact that Iran's missile program plays a crucial role for both the US-West and regional countries, raising concerns and presenting an inevitable challenge in the Middle East. Iran's continuous development of missile capabilities has the potential to disrupt the regional and international status quo.

The timeframe of this study focuses on the period between the signing of the JCPOA deal in July 2015 and the completion of this research in July 2023.

This paper seeks to answer the question: did the international community succeed in its coercive diplomatic efforts toward Iran? It provides a discerning view of how Iran exploits the failure of coercive diplomacy to launch missile diplomacy. A qualitative method has been used to collect data and answer the research question. The descriptive method utilized in this research is dedicated to understanding the theoretical aspects of the study, particularly those pertaining to coercive diplomacy and missile diplomacy. Additionally, an essential part of the research methodology involves discourse and text analysis, enabling the examination of statements made by decision-makers on this topic. Moreover, the research relies on the future method to predict the trajectory of US-Iran relations.

The paper consists of four parts: (1) a review of coercive diplomacy conceptualization; (2) an outline of coercive diplomacy and Iran's missile program; (3) an overview of missile diplomacy; and (4) a framework for explaining Iran's aims in missile diplomacy.

Literature Review

All related non-Iranian literature concerning the Iranian ballistic missile program has been axiomatically opposed to it, and abundant studies have adumbrated the negative and adverse existential outcomes of Iran's missile ambitions in the regional and international arenas. At the same time, the majority of scholars have acknowledged the failure and negative consequences of Western-led coercive diplomacy with Iran, and have increasingly assessed Iran's efforts to expand its missile capabilities to carry out missile diplomacy toward regional countries and beyond. For example, Michael Elleman (2016), a missile scientist at Lockheed Martin's R&D Laboratory, states in his article Iran's Ballistic Missile Program that Iran has a large missile capacity, and continues to test and launch more missiles even after the JCPOA deal. It is important to mention that the limitation of this article is that it is out of date and covers events up to 2016.

As an essential reference on this subject, "Iran's ballistic missile program and its foreign and security policy towards the United States under the Trump Administration" by Mohammad Eslami, analyzes Iran's evolving ballistic missile program under the Strategic Culture Theory, focusing especially on the period of the Donald Trump administration (2017–2021). However, the author only provides a snapshot of the recent specified period, and does not take account of the longer term reactions of US administrations and other institutions.

Two of the most essential theoretical and conceptual works on coercive diplomacy are The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy by George, A.L., Simons, W.E., Hall, D.K., Jentleson, B.W., Sagan, S.D., Herrmann, R., Lauren, P.G. and Zimmermann, T. eds. (1994), which focuses on the theoretical and conceptual analysis of coercive diplomacy and its types while highlighting its limitations; and the previous mentioned article by Jervis (2013). The latter tries to explain the concept of coercive diplomacy scientifically and clearly and explain its main elements. Furthermore, the author mentions several case studies in order to better understand the concept. However, the article was published before the JCPOA, which is the period of focus in this study.

It can be said that this paper is a new attempt to link the two concepts of coercive diplomacy and missile diplomacy. At the same time, the paper goes beyond a purely theoretical view in its consideration of practical aspects by taking Iran as a case study.

1- Coercive diplomacy conceptualization

Conceptually, the term "coercive diplomacy" appears to be an oxymoron (Harris, 2020). In general, coercive diplomacy is an effort to persuade an opponent to reverse or give up an action without putting up resistance, as coined by George (1994a: 7), who attempted to blend the nuance of diplomacy with the harshness of coercion (Harris, 2020). At its core, the resulting variant of coercive diplomacy is often referred to as an example of the "carrot-and-stick" approach (George, 1994b: 16). Other variants of coercive diplomacy exist called the "try-and-see" approach, which means that one or another of these components of an ultimatum is absent or diluted. In this approach, the coercing power does not announce a time limit or convey a strong sense of urgency for compliance. After employing one limited coercive action or threat, one waits to see the opponent's response before taking another step (Gorge, 1994b: 18). In a broad sense, the main goal of coercive diplomacy is to persuade the

opponent to give up or at least to undo encroachment instead of bludgeoning him into doing so or physically preventing him from continuing and developing (George, 1994a: 11). In this contribution, the process of coercive diplomacy is based on a cost-benefit analysis (Harris, 2020).

Peter Viggo Jakobsen, in his book Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy after the Cold War, clearly distinguishes coercive diplomacy from other related concepts such as blackmail, "compellence", strategic coercion, and deterrence. Figure 1 distinguishes between coercive diplomacy and other related concepts.

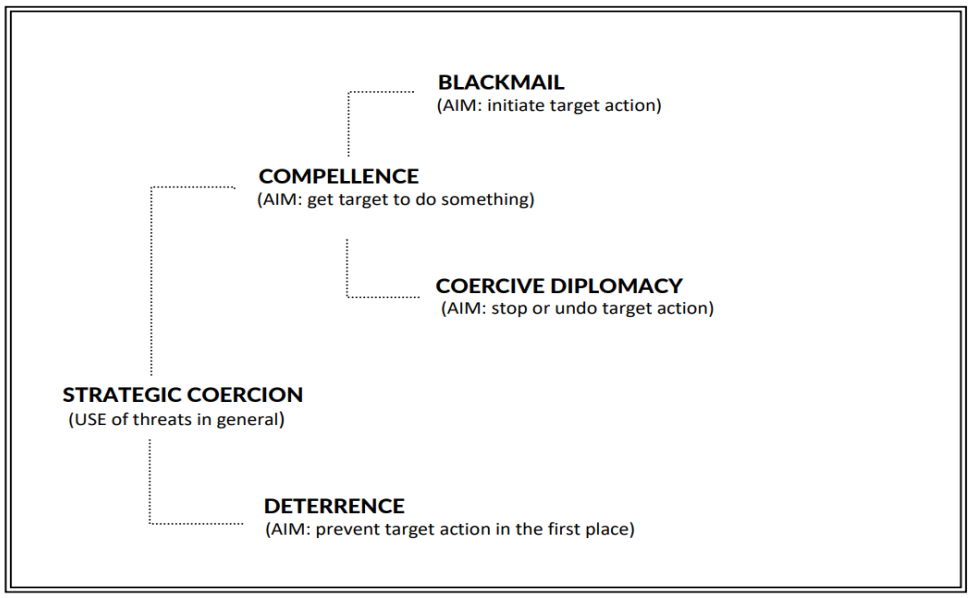

Figure 1: Coercive diplomacy and related concepts

Source: Jakobsen (1998: 12)

The importance of coercive diplomacy stems from the fact that it offers the defender an opportunity to reach reasonable objectives in a crisis with fewer psychological and political costs, without bloodshed, and with fewer risks of unwanted escalation than traditional military strategy. Depending on coercive diplomacy is more likely to prolong strained relations between both sides than actual warfare, but it seeks to delay or avert actual conflict escalations. The powerful side may be tempted at times to consider that they are able to intimidate the weaker side into impeding their challenge to a status quo situation. Nonetheless, the weaker side may be strongly motivated by what is at stake and refuse to back down, in effect alluding to the bluff of the stronger side. Then, the latter must make an ultimate decision about whether to back off or escalate the issue into an armed confrontation (George, 1994a: 9).

The salient characteristics of coercive diplomacy include negotiation, signaling, and bargaining, depending on the conceptualization of any deployments and military maneuvers that are not found in traditional military strategy (George, 1994a: 10). However, based on the reviewed literature (George and et al, 1994; Jakobsen, 1998; George, 1994a; George, 1994b), this paper adopted four main elements of coercive diplomacy as negotiation, sanctions, time pressure, and limited force. The following section attempts to explain those elements by applying them to Iran's case.

The success of coercive diplomacy depends on two main variables and on the relationship between them: what the coercing power demands of the opponent; and how disinclined the opponent is to comply with demands (George, 1994b: 15). In terms of the rate of success of the coercive diplomacy approach, most experts agree that

it is difficult and has a relatively low success rate, which Art and Cronin (2003: 403) quantified at 32%. Some successful examples of coercive diplomacy were the West's response to the Berlin Blockade by using an airlift, and the US response to the Chinese artillery blockade of Quemoy and Matsu in 1948 and 1950 (George, 1994a: 9).

More recently, coercive diplomacy has worked in a few cases, such as convincing the military junta that ruled Haiti to step down in 1994, and in 2003, when Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi partly chose to stop developing weapons of mass destruction due to reassurances and pressure from the US and international community. However, most historical cases reflect the fact that coercive diplomacy could not be successful, leading the US and international community to fall back repeatedly on direct military action, including Panama (1989), Serbia (1998), Taliban-ruled Afghanistan (2001), and Iraq (1990 and 2003) (Jervis, 2013, 106).

Regarding Iran, Jervis (2013) explained that there are only two tools for dealing with the state's advancing nuclear and missile programs: promises and threats. In order to succeed in halting Iran's ballistic missile program, Washington will have to combine the two simultaneously. If the US desires to avoid military action, in the aftermath of numerous debacles throughout the Middle East in recent years, it will have to fundamentally revise its legacy strategy and take more nuanced and sophisticated approaches to negotiations. The US also faces the implications of other interrelated strategic partners pertaining to its own policies on Iran, particularly its close military alliances with Israel and Saudi Arabia. US-Iran relations have also been soured by mutual mistrust and a lack of transparency. All of these factors directly and indirectly affect the prospects of success for coercive diplomacy (Jervis, 2013, 105).

Albeit coercive diplomacy can work in particular cases, it is not necessarily the most effective tool in most cases, as we see in Iran's case study. In sum, coercive diplomacy means any diplomatic or, if necessary, aggressive or military tools used in opposition to a state or group of states that is going to do something or refrain from doing something. In this context, we must inquire why coercive diplomacy toward Iran's missile program failed, as addressed in the following section.

2- Coercive diplomacy and Iran's missile program: An empirical case study

In general, vigorous diplomacy tends to yield results and advances toward well-defined, long-term aims that are inherently beneficial to all parties. The hallmark of the failure of diplomacy is a lack of time-delineated forward progress. As Henry Kissinger (1957) pointed out in A World Restored, in different circumstances and diverse case studies, diplomacy might not be a proper and effective way to resolve disagreements and issues, in the absence of an agreement on what constitutes a reasonable demand (Friedman, 2010: 43). Coercive diplomacy with Iran regarding its missile program is an example of such an exception.

Even after reaching the JCPOA deal, Tehran's security and military services are assured that their ambitions to develop ballistic missiles have not been altered by the implementation of the JCPOA deal. It is crucial to mention that US and Western coercive diplomacy have faced fiascos and could not suspend Iran's uranium enrichment. Instead, unprecedentedly, a week prior to JCPOA Adoption Day, Iran publicized the launch of a new long-range, more accurate, and more developed ballistic missile called the "Emad" (Clapper, 2016: 24). Iran's missile program therefore remains an enigmatic subject for the international community, and the question arises of why coercive diplomacy did not reach a comprehensive solution regarding Iran's missile program. To answer this question, it is important to analyze the Iranian case in the light of the four elements of coercive diplomacy: negotiation, sanctions, time pressure, and limited force.

Negotiation

In 2003, a diplomatic effort undertook by three European Union members, France, Germany, and the UK (the "EU-3"), led to the "Paris Agreement" on November 14, 2004, under which Tehran was obligated to suspend uranium enrichment in exchange for trade talks and other non-American aid. In August 2005, the deal broke down. By May 2006, the US had incrementally expanded the Iran nuclear negotiating group called the "Permanent Five Plus 1". The negotiations continued in Geneva and Istanbul in December 2010 and January 2011, respectively. Additional rounds of negotiations continued in 2012 in Istanbul in April, in Baghdad in May, and in Moscow in June. A year later, the series of talks continued from February to April in Almaty and Kazakhstan without reaching any agreement (Congressional Research Service, 2021: 8-9).

During this protracted international process, the election of Hassan Rouhani (considered relatively moderate) as the Iranian president in June 2013 improved the prospects for a nuclear adjustment. In early 2013 an interim agreement was achieved after private talks between Iranian and US officials in Oman, after the Obama administration fully invested in the negotiations. The JCPOA was officially announced by the P5+1, the EU, and Iran on November 24, 2013, commonly referred to as the "Iran Nuclear Deal". It imposed limitations on Iran's nuclear activities; for instance, uranium enrichment would remain at minimal levels for ten to fifteen years, and a 25-year International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection regime was introduced that was more intrusive than the preceding Additional Protocol, which remains indefinitely (Alcaro, 2021: 12). Moreover, it called on Tehran not to test or develop ballistic missiles (for up to eight years) (Congressional Research Service, 2021: 9).

In this vein, it was expected that the period after 2015 would mark a de-escalation of Iran's missile and nuclear issues after decades of tension, but the US-Iran relationship came under strain when the US decided to unilaterally withdraw from the deal in 2018 (Zangiabadi, 2023: 37). During his election campaign, President Trump labeled the JCPOA "one of the worst deals I have ever seen" (Harris, 2020). Soon after he came into power, he vigorously criticized the previous administration, particularly his predecessor, for making a "bad deal" and paying over 150 billion dollars to Tehran to develop its missile capacity. The upshot was that the US took initiatives to withdraw from the JCPOA deal with the aim of making a new "better deal", which would include Tehran's ballistic missile program, too (Eslami, 2021: 48-49). This was interpreted as aggression by Iran, and it subsequently ramped up its defense program, particularly in terms of its ballistic missiles.

The then President and his entourage clearly announced that while the JCPOA focused heavily on limiting Tehran's nuclear program, it contained little detail regarding ballistic missile program restrictions, and Trump cited this lacuna as the main reason why the US pulled out of the deal (Abu Ghazleh, 2023). As he explicitly asked, "What kind of deal is it where you are allowed to test missiles all over the place?" (Taleblu, 2023: 62). In May 2018, Mike Pompeo, then Secretary of State, stipulated 12 highly ambitious requirements regarding the JCPOA deal, including that Iran had to end its proliferation of ballistic missiles, as well as halt further launching or development of nuclear-capable missiles (Einhorn and Diepen, 2019: 2).

After the US withdrew from the JCPOA deal, Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, started retaliatory rhetoric toward the US, viewing it as a major threat to their country. He had long been distrusting of the US motives, and as early as October 2015 had publicly claimed that the US was using the JCPOA deal only to "infiltrate and penetrate" Iran (Clapper, 2016: 24). In response to the US disengagement under Trump, Iran adopted the strategy of "reduced compliance" with the JCPOA, in addition to conducting a series of cyberattacks in the region, in particular against Saudi Arabia and Iraq (Congressional Research Service, 2021: 9).

There was an uncompromising and sharp reaction from Iran, and one of the most offensive statements articulated by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officials. In this regard, the Head of Air-Space Forces of the IRGC proclaimed that the ballistic missile program was a "red line" for Iran, adding that "no one should even dare to hold negotiations in this regard" (Eslami, 2021: 39). A similar view was provided by Iran's current President, Ebrahim Raeesi, who announced that missiles are nonnegotiable (The Iran Project and the European Leadership Network, 2022: 8). Thus, at all stages of negotiations, Iranian leaders have refused to discuss or compromise their ballistic missile program, and they have not refrained from flight-testing and proliferating key programs (Taleblu, 2023: 60).

The US withdrawal from the JCPOA has rendered the latter practically invalid, and has negatively affected Iran-US relations, noticeably increasing mistrust between both sides. In this regard, Ayatollah Khamenei stated that "the evil US once again showed that trust to the Great Satan is wrong" (Eslami, 2021: 49). The former Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, observed that after this experience the project of a nuclear deal has been closed forever, and "Iran will never negotiate on JCPOA again" (Eslami, 2021: 53).

Moderate voices and optimists in Iran hoped that positive indications made by Joe Biden during his presidential election campaign would lead to a post-Trump rapprochement and a new policy toward the ballistic missile program. One of Biden's core foreign policy promises was resuming and backing the JCPOA, and after becoming President in 2021 he subsequently gave the green light for resuming negotiations with Tehran and lifting the sanctions that had been imposed by the previous cabinet. However, from the beginning, the Biden administration made it clear that it would not take unilateral steps; it also enunciated that it was ready to meet with Iranian officials to discuss how to get rid of the previous administration's maximum pressure policy without prejudice to US non-proliferation concerns (Alcaro, 2021: 18). The US has not officially returned to the JCOPA.

The JCPOA deal was further complicated by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. On March 11, 2022, Joseph Borrell, the EU foreign representative, argued Iran's talks would halt due to "external factors" (Loft, 2023: 23). However, Iranian provision of unmanned aerial vehicles to Moscow for use against Ukraine has refocused international community attention towards security threats posed by Tehran. In the Washington Post in October 2022, it was reported that Iran would send additional missiles and drones to Russia for use in its war against Ukraine (Taleblu, 2023: 32), including the Shahed-136, that have devastated Ukrainian critical civilians and infrastructure (JINSA, 2023: 6).

The most important point here is to assess the level and effectiveness of negotiations as an element of coercive diplomacy in the case of Iran. Even when serious negotiations were underway in 2005, 2013, and 2014, Iran did not conduct a nuclear-capable missile launch. However, from 2006 to 2012, when negotiations were going nowhere, Tehran's efforts to test ballistic missiles increased significantly (see Figure 2) (Elleman, 2016). In addition, since agreeing to the JCPOA nuclear deal in 2015, Iran has launched over 228 ballistic missiles (see Figure 3), averaging more than 32 missiles per year (Taleblu, 2023: 23). The US withdrawal from the JCPOA deal was also a major incentive for Iran to increase and test its ballistic missiles. For instance, in 2022, Iran launched at least three times as many missiles as it did the previous year (Taleblu, 2023: 9).

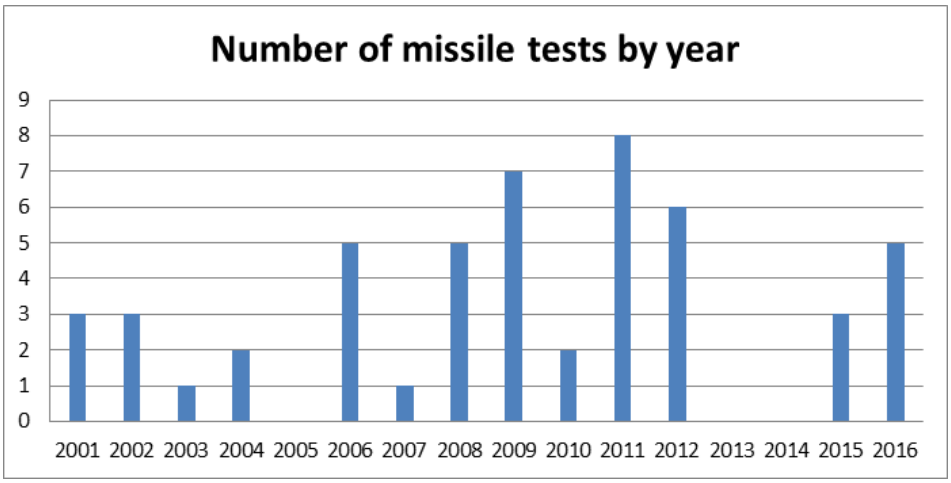

Figure 2: Approximate number of missile tests by year (2001-2016)

Source: Elleman (2016)

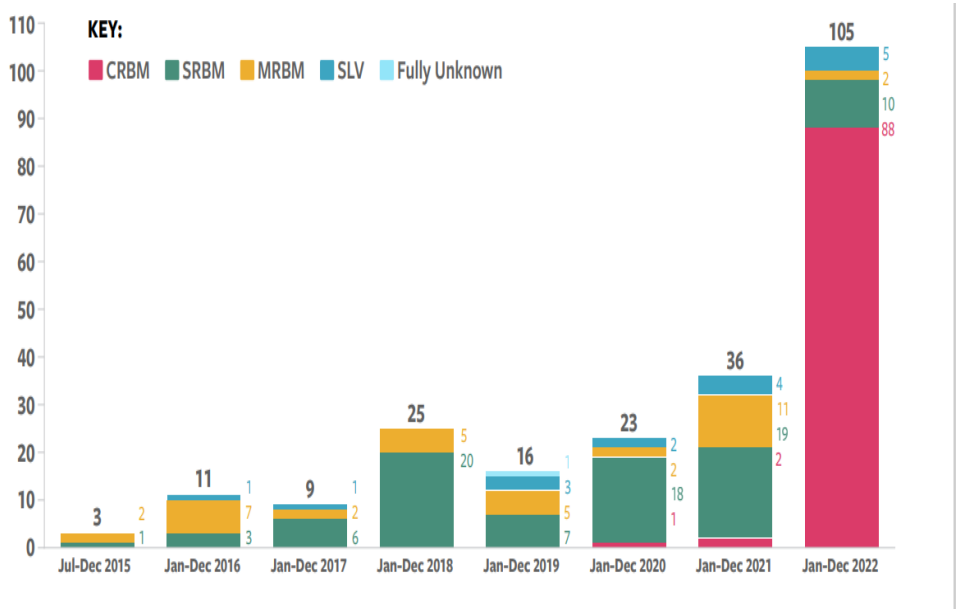

Figure 3: Iranian ballistic missile launches by year and class (post-JCPOA to December 2022)

Source: Taleblu (2023: 24)

In sum, despite being considered a landmark achievement in its own right, the JCPOA has not led to any substantive development since 2015. One of the main reasons for its failure was that this "nuclear agreement" did not cover conventional weapons, especially ballistic missiles. In addition, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other regional countries continue to fear that any effort to renew Iran's nuclear deal might embolden Iran's ballistic missile capacity further. In short, negotiation is unlikely to deter Tehran from developing and testing its ballistic missiles. Even with less transparent information and data regarding Iran's post-JCPOA missile launches, if the JCPOA had been successful, Iran's missile launches would have been approaching at least a minimal level. At the same time, negotiation is still the best and most peaceful option to halt Iran's missile ambitions.

Sanctions

One of the common tools in the frame of coercive diplomacy toward Iran is sanctions, which are imposed by international entities and superpower countries. They are striving to counter Iran's missile program through sanctions aimed at preventing or limiting its ballistic missile capacity. For its part, the UN has imposed a series of sanctions against Iran in order to force it to concede its nuclear and missile efforts. The UNSC has imposed seven resolutions from 2006–2010 regarding Iran: Resolutions 1969, 1701, and 1737 in 2006, 1747 in 2007, 1803 and 1835 in 2008, and 1929 in 2010 (Arms Control Association, 2022). Almost all binding resolutions call on Iran to undertake the following actions:

Suspend uranium enrichment and missile development while fully cooperating with the IAEA. This includes granting the IAEA access to all relevant documents, sites, and equipment (Alcaro, 2021: 7).

Prohibit the delivery of missiles to militia groups (Loft, 2023: 21).

Freeze the assets of companies allegedly linked to Tehran's ballistic missile program and impose a ban on items that have "dual-use" applications for these programs (Gopalaswamy, 2008: 3).

Notably, 2015 was one of the toughest years for sanctions against Iran as a part of coercive diplomacy by the international community. UNSC Resolution 2216, adopted in April 2015, prohibits Iran's supply of weapons to non-state actors in Yemen, in particular the Houthis (Loft, 2023: 22). On July 20, 2015, UNSC Resolution 2231 was designed to supersede and replace all previous resolutions regarding Iran's launching of nuclear weapons, and to impose an eight-year conditional ban on Iran. This resolution only prohibits missiles "designed to be capable" of delivering nuclear weapons (Izewicz, 2017: 8). The resolution also emphasized prohibiting heavy weapon-related trade with Tehran for a minimum of five years until explicitly approved by the UNSC (Ghasseminejad, 2016: 3).

The ongoing sanctions against Iran have harmed the country's economy. As the World Bank reported, from 2016 to 2022, Iran's GDP shrank from $457.95 billion to $388.54 billion (The World Bank, 2023). External shocks, including sanctions and commodity price volatility, caused a large contraction in oil exports placed significant pressure on government finances and drove inflation to more than 40% (The World Bank, 2022).

According to the above discussion, Iran is one of the most sanctioned countries in the world, and international sanctions may have hurt the country economically, but they have not proved a deterrent to its missile and nuclear ambitions (Parasiliti, 2009: 8). As Kenneth Waltz (2012: 2-5) observed, sanctions toward Iran (as with the previous sanctions regime towards Iraq prior to 2003) primarily harm the lives of ordinary Iranians, while they do little to weaken the regime that they ostensibly target. The historical record virtually concedes that punishing a state through sanctions does not inexorably derail its nuclear ambitions. For instance, North Korea has succeeded in obtaining nuclear weapons despite endless UNSC resolutions and sanctions. Regardless of whether Iran determines that its security relies on possessing nuclear weapons, economic sanctions play a negligible role in their calculations (Waltz, 2012: 2).

In response, Iran has established alternative trading companies to replace those that were previously subjected to sanctions (Elleman, 2016). Iranian officials have identified that Tehran has not given up work on its ballistic missile program; instead, Iran intends to develop a ballistic missile program during the JCPOA, in violation of the very resolution endorsing that agreement (Ghasseminejad, 2016: 3). Iranian officials cannot have failed to

notice that the US has not attacked their country despite continuing Iranian defiance of US policies and UN resolutions. Iran also believes that the US is not bombing North Korea as it develops its nuclear weapons, despite repeatedly issuing extreme threats that it would do so (Jervis, 2013: 109).

The previous analysis showed that it is difficult to imagine that economic sanctions have been successful as a tool of coercive diplomacy in Iran's case. While sanctions place great stress on the Iranian economy, they do not appear to be effective in forcing Iran to give up its missile program. Furthermore, it is important to mention that the sanctions and restrictions placed on Iran regarding its ballistic missile program under the JCPOA deal in 2015 are due to expire, rendering previous efforts to prevent it acquiring more ballistic missiles void. The failed attempts at engagement call into question if imposing sanctions alone without specifying time pressure is the proper and effective means for achieving a settlement regarding Iran's ballistic missile issue. This question is addressed in the next section.

Time pressure

As diplomatic and economic tools to pressure Iran to curb its ballistic missile program failed in the years after 2015, the international community adopted inertia concerning how to deal with Iran. Many experts agree that coercive efforts have been frustrated because of the absence of time pressure, which is the main reason why coercive diplomacy toward Iran is ineffective. As Jakobsen (1998: 29) states in his book Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy After the Cold War, "Opponents will simply not perceive a threat of force as credible unless it is accompanied by a deadline for compliance".

Tom Saure (2007: 615) explains the importance of time pressure as an essential element of coercive diplomacy by saying that the threatened state will not give in if the time pressure is too tight or not tight enough. Benjamin Harris (2020) more recently reaffirmed this hypothesis, saying that coercive diplomacy can be supplemented by a time limit for compliance; thus, the impact of coercion could be galvanized by an ultimatum. Regarding Iran's case, Tom Sauer (2007: 629), in his article "Coercive diplomacy by the EU: The Iranian nuclear weapons crisis" argues that by considering all necessary factors for coercive diplomacy since 2003, it would be extremely difficult to convince Iran. None of the factors, except time pressure, was effective in achieving successful coercive diplomacy.

Regardless of the theoretical side, coercive diplomacy in practice is more complicated. For instance, in the Iranian case, the international community has set several deadlines for Iran to give up its nuclear program, such as October 2003 and 2004; four different times in 2006 (March, April, July, and August) (Sauer, 2007: 628); and in 2015. However, none of these dates compelled Iran to comply with the deals; instead, give it enough time and incentivized it to undertake more nuclear activity and uranium enrichment (Eslami, 2021: 38).

In summary, although most diplomatic and economic efforts have set a timetable and time pressure for the implantation of conditions and demands, there has been no reason for their success. What is worth noting is that Iran's missile program is becoming an urgent issue, and its threat is higher than ever. Consequently, the time has come to consider alternative options, such as threatening by using limited force. In this regard, the possibility of using threats or limited force against Iran will always be an open possibility.

Using limited force

It is important to acknowledge the fact that the threat of using limited force is not the exclusive option in coer-

cive diplomacy, and it is one of the oldest options that has always been discussed in the Iranian case. Experts in the field have divided into two camps regarding using military force as an element of coercive diplomacy. Some agree that a threat or limited force does not mean the use of force per se, and the main objective of coercive diplomacy is to persuade through threats, not actually using force in violent conflict (George and et al, 1994). Harris (2020) explained regarding the Iranian case that coercive diplomacy is not limited to military action alone; threats paralleling diplomatic efforts and economic sanctions impacts are frequently used and form a theme in the case of Iran. However, others, including Jakobsen (1998: 13), believe that the use of ground troops or full-scale force must never be excluded from the coercive diplomacy process.

Based on the above discussion, it is important to note the difference between limited and full-scale force. The principle difference between them, as explained, is that the former seeks to impose threats or limited force against the opponent to comply; this strategy seeks to avoid escalation, whereas the latter means imposing compliance against the opponent; in this strategy, it is hoped that non-compliance is deemed to be too costly and risky for the targeted actor. However, Jakobsen (1998: 14-17) noted that distinguishing between full-scale and limited force is impossible to operationalize in practice. If the use of full-scale force is resorted to within the framework of coercive diplomacy to defeat the opponent in order to obtain compliance, coercive diplomacy fails because the main objective of coercive diplomacy is to avoid war.

Regarding the potential use of full-scale force against Iran, a paper titled Weighing the Benefits and Costs of Military Action Against Iran was signed by over 30 security, public diplomacy, and military experts. Through an in-depth analysis, they reached a consensus that a full-scale war initiated by the US against Iran would not achieve its objective of curbing Iran's development of combat missiles. Instead, it would likely serve as an incentive for Iran to further enhance its missile capabilities for self-defense purposes (The Iran Project, 2012).

The US and its allies came to the pragmatic realization that the use of full-scale force against Iran would be untenable for various reasons. These include political calculations and Western and international public opinion in the wake of a string of debacles throughout the Middle East and North Africa since 2003, and the capability of Iran to inflict massive regional and global retaliation on US interests (e.g., via its proxies throughout the Middle East). Consequently, given that neither diplomatic effort nor sanctions were likely to prevent Iran from developing ballistic missiles, they worked to prevent Iran's ambitions for its missile program using coercive diplomacy and limited force, with the latter deployed in forms such as assassinating key scientists and personnel in the nuclear and missile field, and using cyberattacks against the production centers of missiles and nuclear programs.

Assassination of Iranian scientists

The assassination of Iran's nuclear scientists has become an integral part of broader efforts to sabotage Iran's development of nuclear and missile capabilities. Even though no group has claimed formal responsibility for the attacks, it is generally acknowledged that the US and Israel is instrumental in such attacks. During the period 2010–2012, at least five Iranian scientists involved in nuclear and ballistic missile technologies were attacked, as adumbrated by Burgis (2012):

Massoud Ali Mohammadi, a nuclear expert and Iran's representative at the Sesame Project, killed in January 2010;

His successor as Sesame Project representative, Majid Shahriyari, killed on November 29, 2010;

Fereydoon Abbasi-Davani, who survived a similar attack on the same morning, but sustained injuries – he was named in UN Resolution 1747 (2007) as a senior Ministry of Defense scientist involved in ballistic missile and nuclear programs;

Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshna, deputy head of Iran's main uranium enrichment facility at Natanz according to the semi-official Mehr news agency, killed on January 11, 2011; and

Dariush Rezaei-Nejad, killed on July 23, 2011.

Assassinating Iranian scientists and professionals continued even after the JCPOA agreement. In the beginning of 2020, both Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the Iraqi commander of the Popular Mobilization Committee, and General Qasem Soleimani, head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards' Quds forces from 1998, were killed in Baghdad in January 2020 in a US drone strike. This tactic is considered to mark a significant turning point in Iran's ballistic missile program strategy and policy, and it was also an opening for a new chapter in Iran's defense policy. Iran has not relented in the face of such US attacks. In retaliation for the assassination of Soleimani, Iran attacked Iraqi bases hosting US forces through ballistic missiles at Ain Al-Asad and Al-Taji, representing the first official attacks by Iran on US military interests since the Second World War (Eslami, 2021: 51).

Subsequently, Iran's Supreme Leader stated that "Iran will have a decisive and destructive response to any strategic mistake of the enemy" (Eslami, 2021: 53), and Ebrahim Raeesi affirmed that "negotiation with the killers of General Soleimani is haram (unlawful in Islam), we will meet American terrorists sooner or later for revenge and not negotiation" (Eslami, 2021: 47).

On November 27, 2020, the Iranian nuclear scientist Professor Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was assassinated near Tehran. In response, following the assassination of Fakhrizadeh, the Iranian Parliament approved two main provocative laws about Iran's security policy and strategy. First, the Iranian government should take some steps further by regulating uranium enrichment at 20 percent as well as adding roughly 1,000 new centrifuges to the circle of enrichment. Furthermore, based on this law, the Iranian government must withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the JCPOA. Second, the law committed the Iranian government and Armed Forces to make a more comprehensive plan and strategy in order to destroy Israel by 2040. In the same year, the Iranian Army held its biggest drone test in its history. As the Deputy Commander of the Army points out "Iran is a drone superpower". Moreover, the IRGC released a new underground missile city in the south of Iran. In this regard, the Head of the IRGC announced that "this is only one of the several underground missile bases, and we are ready to nip any possible threat in the bud" (Eslami, 2021: 54).

Within the same context, in response to the assassination of Iranian experts and scientists, almost all Iranian leaders, academics, and positions asserted that such acts had and would have no impact on Iran's development of nuclear and missile capabilities (Butler, 2010: 607; Burgis, 2012). In other words, the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists and professionals is not a panacea for resolving Iran's missile case. It will not force Iran to relinquish its missile and nuclear ambitions.

Cyberattacks against Iranian nuclear and missile programs

Invisible cyberspace has played out in increasing tensions between the US and Iran. There are many different cyber activities that the US and Israel on one side and Iran on the other resort to in order to weaken the other side, including computer viruses, cyber-sabotage, cyber-espionage networks, hacking, and banking cyberattacks. The US cyber offensive operations against Iran date back to 2006, when the US attacked Iran through the Stuxnet virus on Natsnz, which damaged approximately 300,000 computers and 1,000 centrifuges. According to the available data, before the JCPOA deal, from 2009–2015, the US tried to weaken and destroy Iran's nuclear program more than four times through cyberattacks. Tensions between Iran and the US have intensified further after the US pulled out of the JCPOA deal. For this reason, the US has intensified its cyberattacks to destroy Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities. For instance, since May 2018 onward, nearly eleven cyberattacks have been carried out by the US against Iran (Hanna, 2021).

Israel, in parallel with the US, has consistently worked to weaken Iran through cyberattacks, whether by destroying its nuclear industry and equipment or by assassinating experts in the field. The weakening of the JCPOA agreement further opened Israel to intensify cyberattacks against Iran, as is clearly seen by the fact that between 2018 and early 2023, more than 18 cyberattacks were carried out (USIP, 2023a). The most noticeable Israeli cyberattack was in May 2022 on an Iranian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) factory, purportedly in order to prevent Iran from exporting combat missiles to Moscow (Divsallar, 2023).

Although the cyber capabilities of Iran are not comparable to those of the US and Israel, this does not mean that Iran has been silent about cyberattacks and has not reacted. Iran's cyber workforce is a complex network of contractors, using internal academic institutions and private Iranian companies (King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, 2020: 5). Iran has dedicated several organizations and institutions to developing its own cyber forces, including the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), Supreme Council of Cyberspace, National Cyberspace Center (NCC), IRGC Electronic Warfare and Cyber Defense Organization, Basij Cyber Council, National Passive Defense Organization (NPDO), and Cyber Defense Command (Congressional Research Service, 2020). According to US cybersecurity companies, Iranian cyber activities are referred to by the US government as Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs), including lzz ad-Din al-Qassam Cyber Fighters, APT33 (aka Elfin, Refined Kitten, Holmium), APT35 (aka Phosphorous, Charming Kitten, Ajax Security), APT39 (aka Remix Kitten, Remexi, Cadelspy, Chafer, Cobalt Hickman and ITG07), OilRig, and the Iranian Dark Coders Team (Hanna, 2021).

From 2009-2015, Iran attempted to counter the US and its other adversaries six times during the same time period. Even during the JCPOA deal (July 2015–May 2018), Iran continued its cyberattacks; it carried out about five cyberattacks during the period (Hanna, 2021). From the very beginning of the US disengagement from the JCPOA deal, Iranian hackers used a malware infection to inflict $40 million in data damage at the Sands Casino in Las Vegas. Beyond Iran's efforts to damage data, it has worked on developing more sophisticated infrastructure hacking abilities (Greenberg, 2018), especially after the assassination of Qassem Sulaimani, when Iranian officials increasingly emphasized expanding and strengthening their cyber-attacks. In the following days, the US Selective Service System website was disabled due to high volumes of web traffic, which is suspected to have been carried out by Iran (Congressional Research Service, 2020). The Department of Homeland Security issued a bulletin from its National Terrorism Advisory System saying, "Iran maintains a robust cyber program and can execute cyber-attacks against the United States" (Halpern, 2020).

Taken together, diplomatic and coercive diplomacy efforts have failed to deter Iran from developing its ballistic missile program, and indeed have directly induced ramped-up missile activities in some particular instances. While cyber tools might delay and slow down Iran's missile program, they cannot completely stop it. After each cyberattack, Iran has attempted to restore its resources and continue its nuclear and missile programs quickly. Iran perceived that possessing increasingly effective missile systems will make it less likely for the US and other adversaries to launch armed attacks on Iran, and it is prepared to incur low-level limited force activities. The Iranian regime itself relies on missiles as a deterrent and intimidator at the same time against international and regional adversaries. Even though it seems clear that Iran's ballistic missile capabilities are bringing them closer to developing nuclear weapons, the US and the West should refrain from resorting to full-scale force. Doing so could potentially exacerbate regional and international tension.

Missile Diplomacy: An Overview

Missile diplomacy, or rocket diplomacy, essentially dictates the terms to countries' missile holders. Missile launches signal that the regime has reverted to familiar tactics to attract attention (McCurry, 2021). The purpose of the missile attack is not to destroy the site per se. It has advanced warning actors both in the region and internationally (Al Marashi, 2017). As it delivered a symbolic message to the international community that the country takes concrete action to discipline a country that threatens its interests.

Ballistic missiles are not just conventional military weapons; they are more like tools to achieve a political objective in conflicts where war has not been directly and officially declared. Most countries conduct ballistic missile tests that are meant to generate global media attention—a public proclamation of each state's political weight (Al Marashi, 2018).

The 1962 Cuban missile crisis was the first case in point. Recently, missiles have become tools in an ongoing process of diplomacy between actors to end disagreements and conflicts (Al Marashi, 2017). Conversely, missile diplomacy, in most cases, leads to the collapse of diplomatic negotiations (Cambanis, 2022). As Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, the Secretary-General for the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, mentioned, "missile diplomacy or messaging by rockets are reckless acts with potentially devastating consequences" (United Nations in Iraq, 2022).

The tension of Iran's ballistic missile program for regional and international countries is scarcely less intense than that associated with its nuclear weapon ambitions. As James Clapper, the US Director of National Intelligence, stated in his 2016 Worldwide Threat Assessments statement, Iran "would choose ballistic missiles as its preferred method of delivering nuclear weapons, if it builds them. Iran's ballistic missiles are inherently capable of delivering WMD" (Izewicz, 2017: 5). For this reason, the Iranian ballistic missile issue is of both regional and international importance and poses a threat simultaneously.

Differing from coercive diplomacy (see Table 1), even though the main aim of missile diplomacy is to deliver a symbolic message to other actors, countries would not deliver the same political message. Regarding the Iranian case, the country's message through missiles or communication is repeatedly causing dangerous escalation in the region. Iran's motivations behind adapting missile diplomacy are discussed next.

Table 1: The difference between coercive diplomacy and missile diplomacy

Variables	Coercive diplomacy	Missile diplomacy
Elements	Negotiation, sanction, time pressure, limited force, etc.	Using ballistic missiles
The parties	It is a collective policy that no one party can practice alone	It is a unilateral policy
Aims	Seeks to delay or avert direct warfare and persuade the opponent not to initiate or undo an action	Send strong political messages to foes
Consequences	Fewer physiological, political, and bloodshed costs	More physiological, political, and bloodshedcosts

Source: The table prepared by the researcher

Iran's aims in missile diplomacy

The missile capabilities of each country in general and Iran in particular have a number of objectives, the most important of which are defensive and offensive. The following section will be dedicated to discussing this subject.

Defensive aims in missile diplomacy

For Iran, the defense objective is considered the foundation of building Iran's missile system, which includes a number of other objectives such as national defense and maintaining survival, given the painful history of Western imperialism for the country and region. Iranian missile capability has been seen as an indispensable and integral part of national defense strategy. Iranian leaders admittedly believe that missiles are designed to be armed with conventional munitions. They have a uniform view of the missile program; according to them, the potential targets of missile force are an essential part of their legitimate self-defense capabilities; in addition, they are needed to rectify a conventional military imbalance in the Middle East that was created by the decades-old Western arms embargo against Iran, and also by the supply of advanced weapons systems by the international community to its regional rivals (Einhorn and Diepen, 2019: 1-3).

Iran's willingness to develop a ballistic missile program is possibly laden with the regime's ambition to protect the government internally, which is not hidden by Iranian leaders. They believe that regional and international threats could be mitigated through missile capability (Bragg, 2020: 3). Tehran's initial steps towards building a ballistic missile program and acquiring high-level artillery can be traced back to the Pahlavi era in 1977. Following the deposition of the Western-backed Shah during the 1979 Revolution, Iran faced isolation from the West. However, Iran's adaptation of its defensive doctrine, characterized by the development of a ballistic missile program as a deterrent and defense, dates back to the mid-1980s, especially since Iran's missile approach changed critically during the Iraq-Iran War, which is known as the War of the Cities, when Iran's cities were attacked by Iraqi missiles, causing damage and a high number of casualties (Eslami, 2021: 41).

In the 1980s and 1990s, Iran's deterrence strategy took shape vis-à-vis Israel, the US, and its hostile Arab neighbors in the region. This strategy was galvanized by the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, both of which have long land borders with Iran, resulting in the encirclement of Iran by US and allied military forces, amidst bellicose presidential declarations that they were part of the "axis of evil", ripe for regime change. Consequently, the urgent need for an effective deterrence strategy gained unprecedented traction within Iran's strategic community (Zangiabadi, 2023: 35).

Since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Iranian leaders have intensified their efforts to develop their own missile capacity and technology, because the regime change and occupation of Iraq could be seen as a precursor for a replication in Iran, and the imminent threat of US imperialism has been a core defense doctrine for Iran since the Revolution. In 2005, Tehran's defense doctrine was referred to as a "mosaic defense", reflecting an asymmetrical approach by both the Army (Artesh) and IRGC through the mobilization of large militia groups against any foreign invading forces (Eslami, 2021: 42). As Ali Shamkhani, former Iran's Defense Minister, asserted, "Today, by relying on our defense industry capacities, we have been able to increase our deterrent capacity against the military expansion of our enemies" (Elleman, 2016). Iran's ballistic missile program is celebrated as a symbol of the Islamic Republic's national identity, and is seen as one of the country's fundamental strategic policies. In line with this, former President Hassan Rouhani affirmed his appreciation to the defense ministry and IRGC forces for making ballistic missile systems and defending Iran's border (Eslami, 2021: 50).

Thus, most of Iran's leaders and officials believe that ballistic missiles are inextricably linked to a state's survival. As Kenneth Pollack, who was responsible for US forces in the Middle East, noted after the 2003 Iraq War, Iranians armed themselves not against renewed Iraqi aggression, but against a far more powerful adversary, which is the US (Taleblu, 2023: 17). Iran's missile tests have been widely publicized, with parades broadcast on state media. For instance, on the 36th anniversary of the start of the Iraq-Iran War, on September 21, 2016, Iran displayed 16 ballistic missiles on the streets of the capital city, Tehran (Izewicz, 2017: 4).

To that end, Iran is pursuing a diverse range of ballistic missile defense capabilities because it provides a strong position in both peacetime and wartime. Besides, missile defense capabilities provide continuing effective protection of Iran's homeland from regional and international threats.

Offensive aims in missile diplomacy

As a result of unsuccessful attempts at coercive diplomacy with Iran to curb its ballistic missile program, Iran has adopted a more missile-offensive policy, and is now capable of reaching many neighboring countries and beyond. Through missile attacks, Iran attempted to deliver a political message to the target countries and nations. Already, Tehran and its proxies have launched missile attacks on civilian and military targets around the region, including Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Iran's use of ballistic missiles against regional countries has been spotlighted several times since 2009 (Abu Ghazleh, 2023). The proliferation of Iran's ballistic missiles has been a matter of US, regional, and international concern.

Notably, there are multiple objectives behind Iran's ambitions to pursue an offensive missile policy, as discussed in more detail below.

Encountering regional and international adversaries

It is argued that Iran's doctrine and strategic culture have become relatively more offensive than defensive,

which is supported by the revolutionary offensive narrative. This alteration in Iran's policy has been approved by IRGC officials by announcing that Iran's military doctrine has changed from a defensive to a defensive-offensive approach (Eslami, 2021: 57). Iran is one of the countries that has hostile relations with a significant number of countries at the regional and international levels, the most prominent of which are the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. As a consequence, Iran has an active interest in deploying, developing, and acquiring a broad range of missiles. This has stirred concerns over the danger posed by the Iranian ballistic missile program to neighboring countries and beyond (Abu Ghazleh, 2023).

The source of this alteration goes back to Iran's efforts to increase its missile capacity, as the Imam of Mashhad, Ahmad Alamal-Hoda, conveyed that "by having the missile, we do not need a nuclear bomb: a missile strike on the Dimona reactor is enough", and he added that Iran, through its missile capacity, is able to destroy all of the US forces in the region (Eslami, 2021: 46). Iranian leaders are stressing the primacy of deterrence through punishment. Iran frames ballistic missile strikes as a punishment that any outside aggressor would incur. As Khamenei in 2018 assured, "the enemy knows that if they hit one, they will receive ten". Besides, Iranian leaders refined a message conveyed for over two decades: There is no limited war option with Iran (Taleblu, 2023: 35).

After the US withdrawal from the JCPOA deal, in response to this action and the demonstration of Iran's missile capabilities, attacks on various countries and parties have increased significantly. In late 2018, Iran announced the launch of seven short-range missiles against the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan in retaliation for incursions into its territory. In the beginning of 2019, Israel announced that Iranian forces near Damascus, Syria, had launched a medium-range missile into the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights (Einhorn and Diepen, 2019: 17). The American officials themselves do not hide the fact that the US withdrawal from the JCPOA deal has paved the way for Iran to work again on advanced centrifuges. As Bill Burns, CIA Director, stated, aside from withdrawing the US from the deal, Iran has accelerated its capability to enrich uranium, particularly to higher levels (USIP, 2023b).

From 2019 Iran's missile offensive attacks increased significantly, and the regional situation was exacerbated, especially in May of that year when five oil ships were attacked with missiles at the Fujairah port of the UAE, and in September, the world's biggest oil company (Aramco) was attacked in Saudi Arabia (Eslami, 2021, 38). In this matter, Ian Williams, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, advocates that Iran's aim is to develop ballistic missiles to "achieve a capacity to be able to at least take on Saudi Arabia in a conventional war and not lose" (Bragg, 2020: 3). Kenneth Katzman, a Senior Fellow at the Congressional Research Service, notes that the missile attack against Saudi oil facilities in 2019 was incredibly accurate (Bragg, 2020: 5). In the same year, Iran's air defense system shot down the largest and most advanced US UCAVs and the Global Hawk RQ4 (Eslami, 2021: 39).

Missiles as a reason for achieving regional hegemony

Iran's self-image as a regional actor derived from historical empires is a powerful driver, as are its beliefs about the need for a large and powerful military force and symbols of political power. In this regard, ballistic missiles have come to symbolize coercion and power in international politics. They have been utilized as a major tool of political intimidation and coercion (Gopalaswamy, 2008: 2). More than ever, after the regional changes since 2003, Iran has the ambition to become a regional actor in the Middle East. What has supported Iran's desire is that it is listed as the biggest country in the entire region, with over 70 million inhabitants (Sauer, 2007: 628). Economically, Iran ranks second in the world for natural gas reserves, and fourth for proven crude oil reserves

(The World Bank, 2023). Being the only nuclear power in the region other than Israel would further strengthen its position and global importance (Sauer, 2007: 628).

The ballistic missile program by Iran is conceded as a status quo to establish regional hegemony and continue to interfere in other countries domestic affairs (Friedman, 2010: 42). As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley said, "along with its ballistic missile programs, Iran seeks to revise the Middle East regional order and balance of power in Iran's favor" (USIP, 2023b). Even domestically, Iranian officials desire both the general public and the elite to believe that Iran is strong (Taleblu, 2023: 36). Most scholars believe that the increasing precision of Iran's missile capability will lead it to adopt a more offensive doctrine in the future (Taleblu, 2023: 18), and it is an incentive to maintain regional hegemony.

Strengthening the Shia position in the region

Iran is a state with a Shia-Muslim majority, and a theocratic Shia governmental establishment; in contrast, most regional countries identify as Sunni Muslim states. Saudi Arabia is a theocratic Sunni Muslim state whose Islamic identity is premised on Wahhabism, which views Shia Muslims as apostates, and which has historically been devoted to jihad against Shias. Saudi Arabia's regional diplomacy has sought to ostracize and oppose Iran, while Iran has conversely sought to support Shia minorities throughout the Arab world (including in Saudi Arabia itself). Consequently, Iran is seen as the natural defender of Shias worldwide, while sectarian divisions throughout the Middle East have been exacerbated by regional power politics between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Loft, 2023: 4).

Iran's political and strategic position is thus accentuated by its ideational and indeed material and military affiliation with and support for various Shia groups, notably the political faction Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is viewed as a terrorist organization by the international community but which has a normative political wing in the country. Iran is a regional hegemon within the "Shia Crescent", comprising Shia-dominated formations in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, and growing influence among persecuted Shia communities in other countries. Iran's missile offensive dimension is thus related to the Shia religion, and messianic expectations of the destruction of Israel. As Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Aerospace Force of the IRGC, affirmed, "the reason we designed the 2000-kilometer missile, it's aimed at targeting our main enemy, the Zionist regime" (Eslami, 2021: 46).

Supplying proxies

Instability in the Middle East and weak states in some countries, epitomized by Lebanon from the 1980s onwards, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen from 2003, 2011, and 2014, respectively, have allowed Tehran to develop alliances with militias and military groups in those countries and supply proxies (Loft, 2023: 4) (see Figure 4). According to a US report, Iran has spent more than $700 million each year supporting militarily active militia groups (Loft, 2023: 7).

Figure 4: Iran's support for militias in the Middle East

Source: Loft (2023: 7)

Since the 1980s, with the onset of the civil war in Lebanon, Iran's support for Hezbollah has increased. Since 2006, Iran has reportedly provided Hezbollah with more than 100,000 unguided missiles of various ranges; beyond that, over 4,000 Iran-provided missiles were fired at Israel by this group during the 2006 Israeli invasion (Einhorn and Diepen, 2019: 14). In his September 27, 2018, address at the UN General Assembly in New York, Benjamin Netanyahu shared some photos of three of Hezbollah's "secret sites" near Beirut International Airport; all of them deployed Iranian technology to convert the rockets into precision-guided ballistic missiles in order to threaten Israel (Bauer, Ghaddar, and Orion, 2018: 2).

Regarding Yemen, there have been border conflicts and skirmishes in Yemen for many years, but these have escalated since 2014, when the turmoil following Yemen's manifestation of the Arab Spring created a vacuum whereby most of the country came to be divided between two opposing fronts: the Houthi rebels, who are Shia villagers from mountainous regions, and state forces loyal to Yemen's Sunni-majority Arab secularist government, with various other tribal configurations alongside this fundamental division. The nature of Iran's support for the Houthis includes providing anti-tank missiles, short-range missiles, and mines, as well as training fighters in military tactics and weapons (Loft, 2023: 15-16). In this regard, Secretary Pompeo announced that the US has "hard evidence that Iran is providing missiles, training, and support to the Houthis". As reported by the UN, between 2015 and 2017, more than 100 short-range ballistic missiles and rockets were attacked by the Houthis (Einhorn and Diepen, 2019: 15). More recently, in late 2021, Saudi Arabia reported that it had come under more than 1,200 Houthi missiles since 2015, which were supported by Iran (Notte, 2022).

In the years following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US was unsuccessful in installing a representative functional democracy in Iraq, and it descended into ethnic power configurations. Iran essentially dominated the Arab Shia-dominated central government. The disintegration of Iraqi society was epitomized by the ISIS insurgence in 2014, when the Iraqi army fled from Mosul and the Kurdish paramilitary and Iranian-backed militias narrowly prevented the conquest of Baghdad itself (Loft, 2023: 13).

In 2018, Secretary Pompeo reported at the UN that "Iran is transferring ballistic missile systems to Shia militias in Iraq", with the same year's statement noting "credible reports indicate" this was occurring. Media published

in mid-2018 demanded that Iran had transferred dozens of missiles, including Zelzal, Zolfaghar, and Fateh-110 missiles, and other ballistic missile production facilities to Iraq's militias (Einhorn and Diepen, 2019: 14-15). In 2019, the US reported that approximately 608 American troops in Iraq had been killed by the IRGC's missile attack during eight years (2003–2011) (Loft, 2023: 14).

Another Shia proxy group in Iraq, known as Saraya Awliyah al-Dam, is part of a wider policy that Iran has been rolling out since 2019. According to Phillip Smyth, Soref Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Saraya Awliyah al-Dam uses proxies to attack logistics organizations, as well as doing the odd bit of intimidating and extorting the locals. In the attack, the group used Iranian-made "107mm missiles" (Patrikarakos, 2021).

In Syria, since the conflict broke out in 2011, Iran has ramped up security and military support for the Assad regime, including the production of missiles. At the height of the civil war, Syria continues to rely on Iranian assistance for its missile program. Defense Intelligence Agency Director Michael Flynn testified on April 18, 2013, that "Damascus relies on foreign help, mainly from Iran, to advance its solid-propellant rocket and missile development and production capability" (Kerr, Hildreth, and Nikitin, 2016: 5).

As noted above, Iran's offensive ballistic missiles have played an increasingly prominent role in its military modernization. Even though Iran continually claims that its ballistic missile program has not had an offensive nature, the world community remains anxious over changing the nature of Iran's missile program into weapons of mass destruction, particularly since Iran has an inseparable link with militia groups in the region. Any attempt to attack Iran's nuclear and missile programs could fuel violence and escalate the conflict in the region by using drastic militia groups. Consequently, Iran's efforts to acquire ballistic missiles have graver implications than merely protecting the country from external threats, and have palpable implications for a number of religious, political, security, and geopolitical objectives.

Conclusion

Iran is an intrinsic and elemental constituent of the dynamics of the Middle East, and its expanding ballistic missile program has made its role incrementally serious, posing unrest and instability in the region and the world. The ballistic missile program is a controversial subject for the international community as a whole, but for Iran, these missiles have a symbolic characteristic for its sovereignty, and are seen as a core strategic objective in its national and security policies. One of the most appropriate and realistic steps toward normalizing relations with Iran and reducing the Iranian missile threat from the perspective of the international community has been coercive diplomacy. This is a pragmatic process that combines elements of cooperation and coercion simultaneously.

The impact of the elements of coercive diplomacy, such as negotiation, sanctions, time pressure, and limited force, cannot be accurately assessed since no two cases are identical. Regarding Iran's ballistic missile case, unilateral negotiation seems illusory, but it should not be overlooked that despite not being feasible at the current juncture, negotiation with Iran should not be omitted completely, and must remain an essential part of coercive diplomacy's toolkit. Nevertheless, previous efforts to alter Iran's behavior toward its ballistic missile program through sanctions appear skeptical and unproductive. Imposing diverse unilateral and multilateral sanctions seeking to terminate Iran's missile progress have failed to impose a moratorium on developing and testing ballistic missiles, and have even directly exacerbated uranium enrichment in some cases.

There is a kind of consensus among experts interpretation the Iranian missile case that the lack of time pressure is the main reason for the failure of negotiations and sanctions with Iran. Nonetheless, as discussed in detail in this paper, it must not be forgotten that time pressure has never been a stumbling block for Iran's ambitions for achieving and developing ballistic missiles. Threats of using limited force have been discussed as a constant possibility as part of coercive diplomacy, but at the time of this writing, this element has not prevented Iran from expanding its missile capabilities. This option represents the worst-case scenario due to its potential for disastrous consequences.

As expected, Iran has been able to exploit the failure of coercive diplomacy as an opportunity to increase its missile capabilities and, moreover, use it as a diplomatic tool to achieve its national, regional, and international goals. Many predictions and interpretations lead in the direction that the ballistic missile program remains among the most identifiable achievements and Iran's top priority for its foreign policy, which is to continue focusing on increasing its quality and quantity. Iran is now on a path of high velocity toward producing long-range missiles, thereby achieving its longstanding goal of obtaining a decisive deterrent capability by being able to target regional and global sites. While Iran is not the only country to engage in missile diplomacy, other countries such as Russia, North Korea, and Israel also pursue this approach. Additionally, even non-state actors have adopted this type of diplomacy. However, what sets Iran apart is its reliance on missiles as a psychological tool rather than a purely military one.

There are various scenarios and approaches to address the Iranian missile threat and the growing effectiveness of coercive diplomatic efforts, which necessitate further academic research. Several policy recommendations that are crucial for the normalization progress and reduction of intense tensions between Iran and the US-led West can be briefly outlined.

To enhance the rate and influence of coercive diplomacy in the case of Iran, it is essential for both Iran and the US-led West to adopt a 'win-win' strategy instead of a 'win-lose' approach. This strategy can act as a bridge to reduce tensions and promote trust between the two parties.

For the US-led West, it is crucial to limit the objectives to a change in Iran's policy rather than pursuing regime change; any attempt to change the regime could potentially lead to a situation similar to what occurred in Iraq. An engagement policy that brings Iran to the table as an interlocutor with the West would be more beneficial for the international community than marginalization.

The US decision to withdraw from the JCPOA is likely to have a counterproductive effect. On one hand, it will strain relations with Iran even further, and on the other hand, it will provide Iran with an opportunity to enhance its missile capabilities. By taking the initiative to rejoin the agreement, the US can, at the very least, gradually limit the advancement of Iran's missile program.

The participation of Arab states, especially influential regional rivals including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, in the dialogue and negotiation process is essential.

Any future agreements with Iran should consider the lag time factor, and the imposition of targeted sanctions should be applied in cases of non-compliance with the agreement. This approach ensures that sanctions are di-

rected towards the Iranian regime and the factors that contribute to its missile capabilities, rather than negatively impacting the lives of civilians.

To mitigate Israeli pressure and minimize the use of military force against Iran, it is important to involve Israel in the negotiation process, particularly if it supports the JCPOA deal. This approach avoids portraying the agreement as baseless and aimless.

پوختە

بەرنامەی موشەکی بالیستیک بەشێکی دانەبڕاوە لە بەرنامەی ئەتۆمی ئێران، ئەمەش هۆکارە کە مەترسییەکانی کەمتر نەبێت بەبەراورد بە چەکی ئەتۆمی، چونکە موشەکی بالستی توانای لەخۆگرتنی چەندین موشەکی جەنگی هەیە. ئەمەش هۆکارێکە کە بابەتی موشەکی ئێران بەیەکێک لە دیارترین پرسە نێودەوڵەتییەکان هەژمار بکرێت، چونکە مەترسییەکی وێرانکەرە بۆ تەواوی جیهان و ناوچەکەش. لە ئەنجامدا کۆمەڵگەی نێودەوڵەتی بە سەرۆکایەتی وڵاتە یەکگرتووەکانی ئەمریکا، لە دوای ڕێککەوتننامەی پلانی کاری گشتگیری هاوبەش لە ڕێگەی سیاسەتی دیپلۆماسی زۆرەملێیەوە هەوڵی کەمکردنەوەی ئەم مەترسییە دەدات. ئەم توێژینەوەیە هەوڵێکە بۆ هەڵسەنگاندنی ئاستی کاریگەری دیپلۆماسییەتی زۆرەملێ لە چارەسەرکردنی کەیسی موشەکی ئێران لە ماوەی واژۆکردنی ڕێککەوتنامەی پلانی کاری گشتگیری هاوبەش لە تەممووزی ٢٠١٥ تا تەممووزی ٢٠٢٣. ئەوەی جێگەی ئاماژەیە پەیڕەوکردنی ئەم سیاسەتە تاڕادەیەکی بەرچاو سەرکەوتوو نەبووە و نەیتوانیوە چارەسەری ئەم کەیسە بکات. ڕاستی ئەم گریمانەیەش کاتێک بەدەرکەوت کە ئێران بەردەوام بوو لە هەوڵەکانی بۆ زیادکردنی توانا موشەکییەکانی. لەهەمان کاتدا، زیاتر لەمەش، پەیڕەوکردنی دیپلۆماسیەتی موشەکی لەلایەن ئێرانەوە بەمەبەستی بەدیهێنانی ئامانجە هەرێمی و نێودەوڵەتییەکانی. توێژینەوەکە میتۆدی چۆنایەتی وەک میتۆدۆلۆژیا بەکاردەهێنێت. دۆزینەوەکان تیشک دەخەنەسەر ئەوەی کە دیپلۆماسییەتی زۆرەملێ شکست دەهێنێت لە ناچارکردنی ئێران بۆ دەستبەرداربوون لە بەرنامە مووشەکییەکەی و لەبری ئەوە هاندەری ئێرانە بۆ پەرەپێدانی زیاتری توانا مووشەکییەکانی.

کلیلە وشەکان: بەرنامەی موشەکی بالستی، دیپلۆماسی زۆرەملێ، ئێران، دیپلۆماسی موشەکی، بەرنامەی ئەتۆمی

الملخص

يُعدّ برنامج الصواريخ الباليستية جزءاً لا يتجزأ من برنامج إيران النووي، فهو لا يقل خطورة آثاره عن الأسلحة النووية ذاتها، لأن الصواريخ الباليستية قادرة على حمل رؤوس متعددة الأنواع، ولهذا تُعدَّ قضية الصواريخ الإيرانية من أبرز القضايا الإقليمية والدولية، لما فيها من تهديد للسلم والاستقرار الإقليمي والدولي. وبالتالي، كان المجتمع الدولي، بقيادة الولايات المتحدة، يحاول الحد من هذا الخطر منذ اتفاقية خطة العمل الشاملة المشتركة من خلال سياسة الدبلوماسية القسرية. يأتي-إذن-هذا البحث محاولة لتقييم فاعلية الدبلوماسية القسرية في حل قضية الصواريخ الإيرانية خلال فترة توقيع اتفاقية خطة العمل الشاملة المشتركة في تموز ٢٠١٥ حتى تموز ٢٠٢٣. ومن المثير للاهتمام أن اتباع هذه السياسة لم يكن ناجحًا إلى حد

كبير ولم يكن قادرًا على حل هذه القضية. بل بدا جلياً مواصلة إيران جهودها لزيادة قدراتها الصاروخية. وأكثر من ذلك، سعت إيران لتوظيف الدبلوماسية الصاروخية لبلوغ أهدافها الإقليمية والدولية من ذلك. تستخدم هذه الدراسة المنهج النوعي كمنهجية. وتسلط النتائج الضوء على أن الدبلوماسية القسرية تفشل في إجبار إيران على التخلي عن برنامجها الضاروخي؛ بل وبالعكس، تحفز إيران على مواصلة تطوير قدراتها الصاروخية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: برنامج الصواريخ الباليستية، الدبلوماسية القسرية، إيران، الدبلوماسية الصاروخية، البرنامج النووي

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