



## News and Current Events :: US accepts Shahab-3s in Iran's missile arsenal

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US accepts Shahab-3s in Iran's missile arsenalUS accepts Shahab-3s in Iran's missile arsenal, but not long-range ICBMs. Deep resentment in Jerusalem

Two high-ranking US visitors to Israel, National Security Adviser Susan Rice and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, publicly assured Israel this month that the Obama administration "would do what it must" to prevent Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon. Yet at the same time, the same administration informed Tehran that the demand to restrict Iran's missile arsenal did not apply to the Shahab-3 ballistic missile, whose range of 2,100km covers any point in the Middle East, including Israel. This missile carries warheads weighing 760 kg, to 1.1 tons, which may also be nuclear.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon challenged both Rice and Hagel on this mission. It came to light from Washington's demand, in its direct dialogue with Tehran outside the framework of the six-power talks in Vienna, to place restrictions on Iran's arsenal of ICBMs whose 4,000 km range places Europe and the United States at risk.

The Obama administration said it was not demanding restrictions on the medium-range missiles capable "only" of striking Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf. But the comprehensive nuclear accord when it is finally negotiated must apply restrictions on the Sajjil1, Safir, Simorg (satellite launcher), Ashura1 and Ashura2 (other versions of the Sajjil class).

But this US "concession" did not placate Tehran. Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei burst out on May 11: "They expect us to limit our missile program while they constantly threaten Iran with military action. So this is a stupid idiotic expectation." He thereupon ordered missile plants to shift to mass production.

Hagel was not just queried in Israel on this point, but also by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council, when he attended their defense ministers' meeting in Jeddah Wednesday, May 14. Saudi Crown Prince Salman was in the chair.

When Hagel assured those present that their countries had nothing to fear from the rapprochement between Washington and Tehran, he was asked to fully explain President Obama's policy on Iran's missile arsenal. He replied that the plan was to establish a common anti-missile defense network for the region.

In Jerusalem, the defense secretary assured Netanyahu and Yaalon that the close US-Israeli collaboration in maintaining one of the most sophisticated anti-missile shields in the world was sufficient security against Iranian Shahab-3 ballistic missiles.

A joint US-Israeli exercise against missile attack, Cobra Juniper, which takes place every two years, began Sunday, May 18, with the participation of 1,000 US servicemen.

However, neither Jerusalem nor the Gulf leaders accepted Washington's explanations. Their disquiet was further exacerbated by the failure of latest round of nuclear negotiations with the six powers, which took place in Vienna Thursday, May 15, to bridge gaps between the sides and so prevented a start on the drafting of a final accord.

These widening gaps reflect the growing controversy over nuclear diplomacy in Tehran.

Saturday night, May 17, President Hassan Rouhani speaking to associates at a private meeting voiced his frustration with Khamenei: "That person thinks he knows everything and lays down policy without considering all the facts," he complained.

Rouhani understands that tactical compromises will not bring about substantial relief from economic sanctions that are pressing on his country. He is urging substantial concessions of Iran's nuclear aspirations, enough to convince the world that his country is not after a nuclear weapon.

Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards have rejected this approach. They are not open to real concessions either on their nuclear program or missile arsenal. This intransigence shows no sign of softening under the Obama administration's willingness for compromise at the expense of Iran's potential targets."