

Detering an Iranian Nuclear Breakout

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Whether or not the P5+1 and Tehran reach a nuclear deal, deterring an Iranian breakout, most likely at clandestine sites, will remain a core U.S. imperative for the foreseeable future.

Although the U.S. intelligence community has a strong record of detecting clandestine nuclear programs, it has often failed to correctly assess their status, identify proliferation paths, locate key facilities, or track the activities of proliferation supplier networks. Nevertheless, the international community has a number of tools available for leveling the playing field with Iran, including highly intrusive inspections and monitoring, wide-area environmental sampling, and exploiting Iranian fears that its nuclear infrastructure continues to be penetrated by foreign intelligence services employing human agents and cyber espionage.

In his latest Research Note, Michael Eisenstadt examines every angle of a possible Iranian nuclear breakout, with or without a deal. Guiding his argument is the contention that Iran must be convinced that if it attempts a breakout, it will be caught and will suffer unacceptable consequences. Otherwise, the Islamic Republic will likely keep inching toward its long-held goal.

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