

# Detering the Ayatollahs: Complications in Applying Cold War Strategy to Iran

by [Patrick Clawson \(/experts/patrick-clawson/\)](/experts/patrick-clawson/), [Michael Eisenstadt \(/experts/michael-eisenstadt/\)](/experts/michael-eisenstadt/)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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## About Detering the Ayatollahs

**H**istory offers ample precedent for deterrence as a means of responding to serious security threats, with the Cold War being the most prominent recent example. Yet, applying this logic to one of the most urgent deterrence issues of the day -- the Iranian nuclear program -- is neither a simple nor a clearly appropriate course of action. How does the Iranian regime view its own nuclear ambitions and the varying international responses to its activities? And

can the United States and the international community use deterrence as a means of dissuasion -- that is, to convince Tehran that pursuing nuclear weapons is simply not worth the political, economic, or strategic costs?

In this Policy Focus -- the first paper in The Washington Institute series "Agenda: Iran" -- editors Patrick Clawson and Michael Eisenstadt have assembled a distinguished group of experts to pose questions about the use of deterrence in countering the Iranian nuclear problem. The paper takes a multidisciplinary and multifaceted approach to this problem, with chapters discussing the strategic and ideological mindset of the Iranian regime, the balance of interests between Washington and Tehran, the prospects for cooperation from Europe, the Iranian military's ability to safeguard a potential nuclear arsenal, the regime's calculus concerning domestic pressures, and numerous other key issues related to both the Iranian nuclear dilemma and deterrence in general. Without exhaustive contingency planning and a concerted push for diplomatic solutions, the editors argue, the United States risks making miscalculations that could have far-reaching consequences.

With contributions by Lewis Dunn, Gregory Giles, [Mehdi Khalaji](#)

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC10.php?CID=33>), Jeffrey Lewis, Keith Payne, Karim Sadjadpour, and Bruno Tertrais ❖

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