

Iranian Public Opinion on the Nuclear Program: A Potential Asset for the International Community

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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While the international community debates options for halting a defiant Iran's nuclear program, most observers assume that the Iranian people support the regime's nuclear efforts, and that any dissent centers on tactics rather than substance. By this view, nuclear progress is an expression of the country's national pride and its sovereign right to develop and modernize. The truth is more nuanced, however. Beneath the veneer of unanimity, there is much more debate among the populace than conventional wisdom would report.

In this new timely Washington Institute Policy Focus, visiting fellow Brig. Gen. Michael Herzog shows how Iranian public opinion can be used as a powerful new policy tool for compelling Tehran to change its nuclear stance. The regime regards public support for the program as essential to fending off both domestic and external pressures. Accordingly, the international community should cultivate the existing seeds of opposition by initiating massive outreach to the Iranian people, highlighting the economic and diplomatic costs of continued nuclear progress, making clear the risks of a militarized nuclear program, and even exploiting subtle divisions within the regime itself. The more confident Tehran grows of public support, the more defiantly it will act -- depriving it of such support is therefore critical to defusing the mounting nuclear crisis.

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