Understanding Nuclear Threats: The Open-Source Intelligence Revolution

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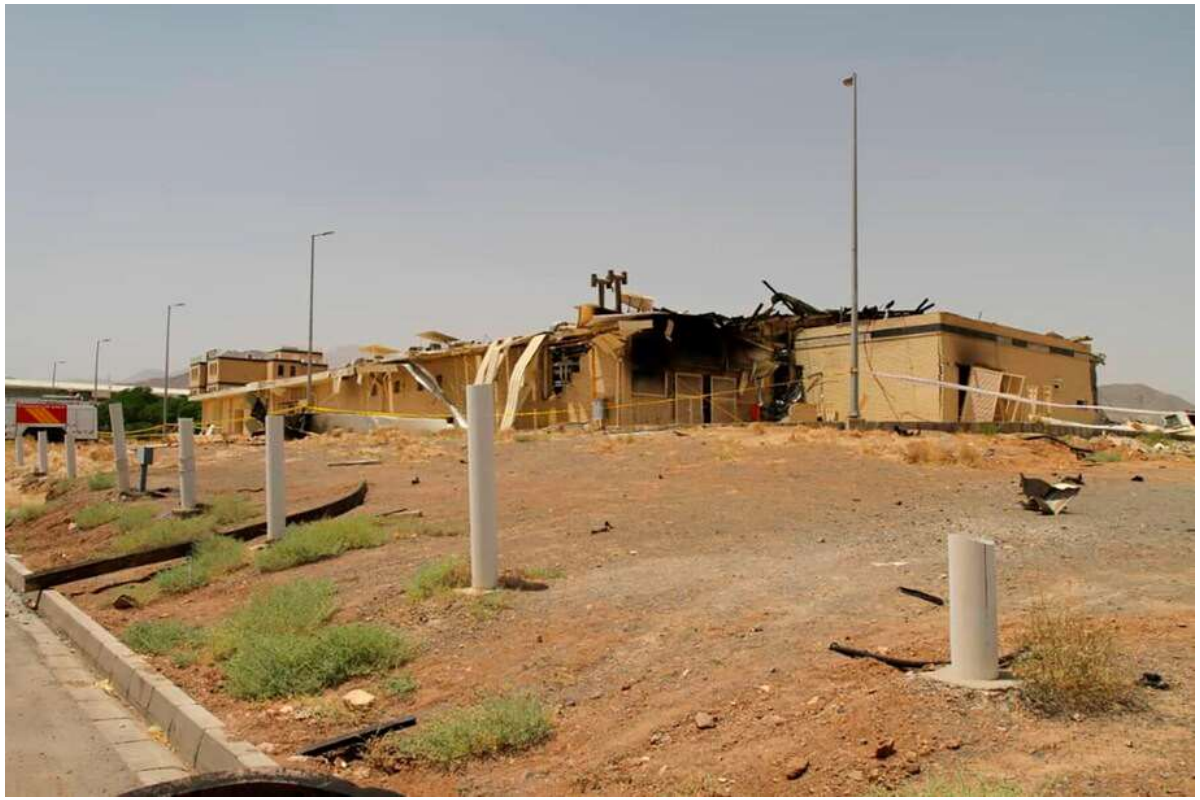
Iran's 2020 "Industrial Shed" Fire



Atomic Energy Organization of Iran via AP

Iran's Atomic Energy Organization releases this photo July 2, 2020

An "incident" affecting an "industrial shed" under construction

Overhead Imagery Reveals a Very Different Picture

Source: David Albright, Sarah Burkhard, and Frank Pabian, Institute for Science and International Security, July 8, 2020

Nuclear Threat Intelligence Isn't Just for Governments Anymore

- How we got here: commercial satellites, the Internet, AI
- Key differences between the OSINT ecosystem and US Intelligence Community
- Benefits, risks, and questions

Nuclear OSINT: The Star Wars Cantina

Two Vastly Different Ecosystems, Each with Strengths and Weaknesses

	Non-governmental open-source intelligence	US Intelligence agencies
Customer	The world	The nation
Membership	Open: Anyone can join from anywhere	Closed: Hiring rules and security clearances
Analyst backgrounds	Broader	Narrower
Product quality control	Voluntary, informal peer review	Mandatory, formal peer review
Ecosystem speed	Faster	Slower

Benefits and Risks

+ More hands on deck
+ More sharable information (within USG, across countries)
+ More diverse analytic perspectives

- Mistakes can go viral – sapping attention, resources
- Deliberate deception
- Countermeasure risk
- Crises become harder to manage

Key Questions

- When, where, how can nuclear threat OSINT be additive? Redundant? Clarifying?
- As nuclear seeking becomes more sophisticated and diffused, how will nuclear hiding change?
- How can DOE and the IC institutionalize networks and practices for OSINT collaboration?