



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

STUDIES

Critical Mass: Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East

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Resources: Strategy & Policy

While current U.S. policy seeks to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear capability, history shows that efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation are not always successful. Thus, prudence dictates that we also must explore the question: How would the stability in the Middle East be affected if Iran acquired a nuclear arsenal?

This report provides an assessment of key security issues that may emerge in the event Iran acquires a nuclear capability, to include: the dynamics of a bipolar regional nuclear competition between Israel and Iran; the prospects for (and potential consequences of) a Middle East proliferation “cascade” involving other states in the region; the potential for a “Nuclear Great Game;” and the overarching challenges associated with preserving crisis stability and avoiding regional nuclear conflict. It also explains how Cold War deterrence models may not apply to the nuclear competition in the Middle East, and why missile defenses may prove both destabilizing and cost-ineffective in this environment.