

## Can the United States Prevent Saudi Arabia from Getting Nuclear Weapons?

It is clear that the Saudi's program is now intimately tied to Iranian nuclear decisionmaking.

by [Emily B. Landau](#) , [Shimon Stein](#) / December 4, 2018

After having sought negotiations with previous U.S. administrations on civilian nuclear cooperation, Saudi Arabia has recently renewed these efforts with the Trump administration, for the development of nuclear energy, power plants and desalination reactors. Negotiations on a possible deal are ongoing, although according to a recent *New York Times* article, the administration refuses to say where things currently stand. Saudi Arabia claims that it is seeking purely civilian capabilities, but it has also insisted on retaining its “right” to work on the fuel cycle and enrich uranium, which can lay the ground for a military nuclear capability in the years ahead. However, it is also clear that the Saudis’ nuclear plans are intimately tied to Iran’s, and since 2010 Saudi leaders have become more and more open about the fact that if Iran attains nuclear weapons, they will quickly follow suit. The latest statement was by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) in March 2018, in the context of an interview to 60 Minutes. He noted that while Saudi Arabia does not want to acquire nuclear weapons, if Iran develops nuclear weapons, so would Saudi Arabia. Generally speaking, the Iranian program has been a trigger for additional Gulf states to establish or revitalize civilian nuclear programs.

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