

Abstract

Cruise missiles have been proliferating since World War II, leading to their gradual sophistication throughout history which has expanded to include long range and precision strike capabilities. Alongside these capabilities, the cruise missile is able to carry weapons of mass destruction, making its proliferation an international security challenge. Yet, arms control regulations and nonproliferation regimes have allowed the weapon to multiply completely undisturbed as priority is placed on ballistic missile proliferation instead. The September 2019 cruise missile attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil facilities changed the perception of cruise missiles as it highlighted the threat these weapons pose in the hands of states like Iran. Furthermore, the attacks showed the world that these weapons had been introduced to nonstate actors, furthering the danger of its use within conflict ridden regions like the Middle East. Iran's investment in cruise missiles began prior to this attack and stems from its ongoing security conflict with Israel. Iran and Israel have fluctuated between amity and enmity ultimately resulting in a regional rivalry that has fueled the proliferation of cruise missiles throughout the region. While the Islamic state incorporated cruise missiles to its missile arsenal, Israel has invested in its cruise missile defense capabilities (Pasandideh, 2019). This dissertation will utilize the theory of regional security complexes (RSCT), to illustrate the impact unstable regional security conflicts have on the expansion of cruise missile usage, sophistication, and capabilities. The research will show that the Iran-Israel conflict has fueled cruise missile proliferation and incited an offense-defense arms race that has extended to include other actors in the region.