

Israel 2072



WHAT CAN WE EXPECT of Israel in 50 years, when the modern Jewish state marks its 124th birthday? The United States reached the same milestone in 1900. To note the comparison is a good way of being struck by how young Israel remains—as old today as America was during the administration of Millard Fillmore. It’s also a reminder of how much Israel has yet to face, for better or worse, as it moves into its adulthood as a modern nation-state.

Navigating the next half-century will not be easy. Antisemitism is resurgent across the globe. Iran may get a nuclear weapon and become a regional hegemon. More of the Arab world could collapse into anarchy. The United States seems increasingly disengaged from the region. Divisions between Diaspora Jews and Israelis—along with ethnic, sectarian, and socioeconomic divisions within Israel itself—could erode the sense of common purpose that has helped Israelis meet past challenges. The two-state solution could become unattainable; a binational state could become unavoidable.

One way to understand the challenges—what they might be,

how they might be overcome, and, more pessimistically, how they might overwhelm Israel—is through an exercise of the imagination. Imagination is not the same thing as prediction, which is usually inaccurate. But a colorful imagination can be an aid to *planning*: to thinking creatively about what sort of outcomes one might expect. With that as prologue, what follows are three visions of Israel 50 years hence: the good, the bad, and (perhaps most likely) the mediocre.



The year is 2072. Israel is thriving and at peace with its neighbors. Palestinians enjoy democratic citizenship in a self-governing, demilitarized, prosperous Palestinian Authority encompassing Gaza and most of the West Bank, with Israel retaining control of East Jerusalem and the large settlement blocks. Israel’s gross domestic product is six times as large as it had been in 2022, thanks to decades of macroeconomic stability, abundant foreign investment, a tech hub that leads the world in nanotechnology, and universities that rank with Caltech and Johns Hopkins as the most scientifically innovative in the world. Its biggest problem in 2072 is that there isn’t enough housing for the Jewish families choosing to leave the United States and Europe to build lives in Israel.

Decades earlier, in the 2020s and early 2030s, Israel’s chief concern had been to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. Yet, despite a long campaign of sabotage and assassination, it could not do more than postpone the inevitable.

And then a geopolitical miracle occurred: In 2032, amid yet another economic crisis precipitated by years of low oil prices and severe droughts, the Iranian parliament voted to eliminate the office of the supreme leader, enlisting dissident Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commanders to enforce the decision. Within hours, Supreme Leader Ebrahim Raisi and his family had fled to Beijing.

The discontent had been building for years. Encrypted communication technology, persistent work among Iranian professionals living abroad, social and ethnic unrest within Iran, and the passing of the 1979 generation had nurtured an anti-theocratic movement that grew despite repeated crackdowns, which only sent it underground. A member of the Pahlavi dynasty, who combined monarchical legitimacy with democratic convictions, was swiftly elected president. She immediately reached out to the West, quietly including Israel. Negotiations led to Iran's permanently forswearing nuclear ambitions in exchange for desperately needed economic aid — aid that, for once, went to helping ordinary Iranians instead of funding Hezbollah and producing ballistic missiles.

Over time, Israel and Iran forged closer ties, even as Israel's relationship with the Arab states again began to fray. Without a common enemy, fair-weather friends such as Egypt's General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi and Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman tried to distract their people from their autocratic misrule by returning to tried-and-true state-sponsored antisemitism. But Israelis had spent two decades traveling to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab states as a result of the Abraham Accords, and Arab populations were no longer so easily duped by propaganda. In 2042, the House of Saud was replaced by an elected government that sought to keep peace with Israel. Al-Sisi was overthrown by his intelligence minister, a secularist who promised to maintain good relations with Israel and Saudi Arabia and a democratic Iran.

Perhaps the most stunning change occurred with the Palestinians. It started with the funeral of Mahmoud Abbas in 2025. The corrupt and ineffective Palestinian leader was unable to negotiate an independent state, and the bitter leadership fight after his demise weakened the Palestinian Authority. At first, this provided an opening for Hamas. But after Hamas used sarin gas shells in its final war with Israel, the IDF had no choice but to reoccupy Gaza and take out the Hamas leadership.

That 2033 war was a tipping point. Images of Jews being gassed

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in Tel Aviv shocked the conscience even of the transatlantic Left. The vast reservoir of support for Palestinians in Western universities dried to a trickle overnight. The use of chemical weapons also outraged Palestinians, in part because some of the shells fell inside Gaza. For the first time in its history, Israel fought a war against Arabs with Israeli Arab volunteers. Having terrified both its enemy and its people, Hamas managed to unify Jews and Arabs in Israel and the West Bank.

All of this opened a path for Mansour Abbas, the first Arab politician to participate in an Israeli coalition government. Crossing from Jerusalem to Ramallah to enter Palestinian politics, he won the Palestinian presidency in a landslide over both Hamas and Fatah. His party unified Gaza and the West Bank for the first time in a generation and began serious negotiations with Israel.

Those talks did not produce the two-state solution envisioned by the Oslo Accords. Instead, they resulted in an economic union between the Palestinian Authority, Israel, and Jordan, with military security provided by the Israel Defense Forces. This Benelux in the Levant soon proved to be an unstoppable economic power, prompting Lebanon — itself freed from the shackles of Hezbollah — to join the union in 2044.

By 2072, Israel's economic prosperity and domestic peace made

it possible to take on a larger regional role. Its navy patrolled the eastern Mediterranean at the request of Cyprus, Lebanon, and Greece, which feared a truculent and unpredictable Turkey. Its army helped train the next generation of senior Iranian military officers. By the 2060s, Israel had replaced the United States as the region's dominant military power.

This combination of peace and prosperity was a powerful magnet for Diaspora Jews. The influx into Israel forced the Knesset to prioritize immigrants by need. Those not actually fleeing oppression were still entitled to citizenship—but the waiting list was now five years long, as Israel managed immigration in line with its ability to build housing, desalination plants, and absorption infrastructure in an environmentally sustainable fashion.



The year is 2072 and Israel hangs by a thread. Its economy has stagnated for decades. The Abraham Accords are a thing of the past: Peace between Israel and the Gulf states has eroded into open hostility. Israelis still lead the world in some innovations, such as desalination and cyber defense. But Israel's Jewish population has declined, and Israel's relationship with the United States has deteriorated. Israel is a weak state perceived by most of the world as a strong bully.

The decline began in 2033, when Iran conducted its first successful test of a nuclear weapon. The cyber command of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard sent a mass text to Israelis with a video of the mushroom cloud and a warning in Hebrew: "Your next day could be your last."

At first, Israelis rallied to the flag. But once Meta decided in 2035 to close its Herzliya campus and Alphabet canceled plans to invest in the Technion, the message was clear: Israel was too risky for the kind of outside investment that had fueled the three-decade boom most citizens had come to take for granted.

As desirable jobs dried up, many of Israel's most talented citizens left for the United States, Cyprus, Australia, or the world's new high-tech capital: India. By 2062, nearly a third of Israeli citizens made their home outside Israel.

Iran's nuclear test also had deep repercussions for Israel's regional standing. The Arab states that had counted on Israel continuously to delay Iran's bomb concluded that they had bet wrong. The 2034 Arab League summit voted unanimously to kick out any state that maintained diplomatic relations with Israel. Nearly 70 years after the infamous Khartoum Resolution of 1967, the Arab world was back to no peace, no recognition, and no negotiations with Israel.

The Jewish state responded by acknowledging the worst-kept secret in nuclear proliferation: It stated publicly that it had hundreds of nuclear weapons, which it reserved the right to use preemptively. Israel's declaration caused a crisis in the U.S.-Israel relationship. Invoking Dwight Eisenhower, President Tucker Carlson suspended military sales to Israel and declared that the United States would not choose sides between what he called "two theocracies, one Shiite, the other Jewish." The U.S. then sponsored a UN Security Council resolution condemning both Iran and Israel. It passed unanimously. Within two years, Saudi Arabia and Turkey had tested nuclear weapons too, turning the Middle East into a nuclear minefield.

Sensing an opportunity, China's government offered Israel a deal. In exchange for Israeli nano-drones and renewed access to Israeli ports, China would distance itself from Iran and sign a 25-year strategic cooperation with Israel. Jerusalem agreed. This was a massive miscalculation. Support from American Evangelicals and mainstream Republicans, initially outraged by the Carlson administration's stance, evaporated overnight. When China used Israel's nano-drones to conquer Taiwan in 2038, the U.S. military ended all defense-technology sharing and training with Israel.

The realignment emboldened the Palestinians. Hamas from

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Gaza, Hezbollah from Lebanon, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards from Syria, and the Houthis from Yemen launched a devastating missile war against Israel in 2042 with Iranian support. The barrages overwhelmed Iron Dome 5, David’s Sling 7, and Arrow 9, Israel’s multitiered missile-defense systems, and Israel suffered the worst military and civilian casualties in any of its wars since 1948. The IDF eventually fought its way to a cease-fire, but Hezbollah and Hamas merely used the pause to rearm with more deadly and accurate missiles. Air raids and funerals became daily features of Israeli life. All the while, Iran cemented its regional hegemony.

By the 2060s, Israelis faced an excruciating choice: all-out war with Iran, potentially involving a full-scale nuclear exchange, or an endless cycle of wars with Iran’s proxies. It chose the latter. Israel’s Jewish population dwindled to a point at which Israeli Arabs equaled the Jewish population, not including the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. With funding from European and American NGOs, Arab parties in coalition with a one-state Jewish party were able to win the 2071 election and form a coalition government. It granted full citizenship to all Palestinians in its territory, paving the way for the negation of the world’s only Jewish state.

The year is 2072 and Israel is muddling through. Its economy remains impressive compared with those of other countries of its size. But the “start-up nation” dynamism that characterized the first two decades of the 21st century has long since petered out. In the early part of the 21st century, Israel’s biggest growth sector was high tech. As the century approaches its fourth quarter, Israel’s largest export is natural gas pumped to Europe via undersea pipelines to Greece.

While Israel maintains a powerful military and remains an innovator in missile-defense and drone technology, it lags in technologies that don’t have direct military applications, such as medical devices and renewable energy. And while a small Israeli elite enjoys oligarch-like levels of wealth (much of it spent or invested abroad), the average Israeli has no chance of owning a home, leading to massive trailer parks running along both sides of Highway 1 from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv.

The gap between ultra-Orthodox and secular Israelis has also widened—but there are now more voters among the former than among the latter. As Orthodox communities swelled with ever-larger families, the increasing progressivism of Israel’s secular elites alienated many Israelis, leading to a spiritual awakening. Shas and United Torah Judaism, which had won 16 of the Knesset’s 120 seats in 2021, eventually controlled 65 seats, transforming the Jewish confessional parties from kingmakers to kings.

The religious parties in the Knesset used their vast political power to mandate the observance of the Jewish Sabbath for businesses and local governments. A board of rabbis was created to review whether existing or new laws in the Knesset violated the Torah. The only reform the religious parties have not yet tried to achieve is a ban on women serving in the military, although they are once again restricted to noncombat roles.

Regionally, Israel maintained good relations with the Gulf states and Egypt. The Mossad identified the Iranian spy ring inside the

Saudi interior ministry that was poised to assassinate Mohammed bin Salman at a party for the king's 58th birthday in 2043, although it continues to deny the rumors. Israel also sent special forces into Egypt in 2039 to hunt down Islamist fanatics who had managed the largest jail break in modern Egyptian history.

Israeli sabotage continued to set back Iran's nuclear program. This prompted Iran to find two new ways to exact revenge. First, it persuaded Vladimir Putin's successor in 2035 to void the long-standing arrangement that had allowed Israeli jets to enter Syrian airspace to strike Hezbollah positions. From then, the Russian no-fly zone for Syria applied to Israel, too. Soon thereafter, Iran supplied Hezbollah with enough precision-guided munitions that, in 2043, the group was able to launch successive barrages that defeated Iron Dome. Large sections of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa needed rebuilding. But it also prompted Israel to invade Lebanon and wipe out most of Hezbollah, something it had not been able to accomplish in its 2006 war.

Iran caught up to Israel in many areas of cyberwar, too. In 2055, the Iranians implanted a devastating virus, known worldwide as "Stuxnet's Revenge," inside the computers that controlled Israel's power grids. The resulting blackout lasted for a week. The failure of Unit 8200 to detect and prevent the intrusion became a national scandal.

The resilience of Iranian tyranny wore down America's resolve. After lifting most sanctions on Iran's energy sector in 2022, the U.S. pursued a policy of de facto neutrality in the Middle East. The silver lining was that Israel's Arab partners actively worked to cultivate a less radical Palestinian leadership. In 2048, 100 years after the founding of the Jewish state, Palestinians agreed to a demilitarized state that allowed Israel to retain the large settlement blocs it had built up in the late-20th century and protect Jewish religious sites on the West Bank.

Unfortunately, two states for two peoples did not bring peace for long. The Palestinian economy remained mired in corruption,

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leading the Islamic State of Palestine to gain the trust of the population. In 2064, they unseated the Palestinian government and declared a war to recapture Jerusalem. Israel had to reimpose checkpoints, night raids, and the counterterrorism policies it had honed during the second intifada.

By 2072, Israel and Iran are locked into a cold cyberwar, even though Israel remains the only Middle East power with nuclear weapons. And nearly 80 years after Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accords on the White House lawn, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict remains largely unchanged.

It's important for readers to draw their own conclusions from these scenarios. But a few points should be clear.

- First, any of these outcomes is possible 50 years hence, given the array of domestic and regional trends currently facing Israel. What that means is that there is no cause for some of the stark fatalism, particularly demographic fatalism, that typifies many conversations about Israel's future. But there is also no reason to feel confident that Israel's current strengths won't evaporate very quickly if they are not zealously guarded.

- Second, no issue more profoundly affects Israel's prospects and even its survival than the fate of Iran's nuclear program. In no scenario does an Iranian bomb detonate over Israeli heads, because the real threat of a nuclear Iran lies in second-order consequences: an emboldened Iran that can dominate its region and wear Israel down through proxy warfare; nuclear proliferation in the world's most combustible region; America's increasing reluctance to continue to stand by Israel's side.
- Third, Israel's current Arab partners in peace did not make peace with Israel for humanitarian reasons. *They are making a bet on Israel as the strong horse.* An Israel that accepts a nuclear Iran on the theory that it can survive through mutually assured destruction will almost surely squander the impressive diplomatic gains of the past decade.
- Fourth, the Palestinian issue will not be resolved with renewed diplomatic negotiations leading to a formal agreement based on old formulas—just as the Abraham Accords came about only through a new approach. Only an internal change in Palestinian attitudes toward Israel will change the century-old dynamic—something unlikely to come about without a complete collapse of the current Palestinian political model of dysfunction and fanaticism. The broader Arab world will be instrumental in making that happen, but only if they continue to see the existence of a strong Jewish state as advancing their own regional interests.
- Fifth, while readers of SAPIR may have little control over Iran's nuclear program, they can still have agency in the here and now to affect long-term outcomes as philanthropists, investors, policy experts, and so on. If some of the scenarios discussed above are frightening, then they should be a call for

preventive action, not a cause for despair. “If you will it, it is no dream” remains basic to the Zionist's ethos.

- Finally, it's not enough for Israel to rest on its laurels—the already-achieved vindication of a people's ancient hope of return to its ancestral homeland. Israel must be a magnet—a continuous pole of attraction to Jews everywhere because of its strength, its prosperity, its resourcefulness, and the sense of purpose that infuses so much of Israeli life. The great task of Israeli statesmanship and Jewish leadership for the next 50 years is to keep that magnetic pull strong. *