

2025 crystal ball: Israel will knock out Iran but face soaring taxes

written by David M. Weinberg | 05.01.2025

The perils of predicting political and diplomatic developments are well known, especially in the Middle East. “Black Swan” events seem par for the course (i.e., events that are highly improbable, difficult to predict, and end up having drastic consequences - like the Hamas October 7 attack).

In my crystal ball column of January 2022, I did foresee tough combat ahead. I wrote that “Israel is likely to wage this year a multifaceted war against Iran’s terrorist proxies in the region - Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad - in successive or simultaneous fashion. A full-scale IDF operation to degrade enemy capabilities in Lebanon and Gaza is just a question of time, and this needs to be done before directly striking at Iran in Iran.”

I then further wondered “whether Washington would give Israel full-throated backing in such circumstances of intense ground combat, with all the civilian casualties this will entail.”

The good news here is that President Donald Trump is returning the White House in two weeks’ time, and there is reason to believe that he will give Israel room to maneuver, meaning an opportunity to finish-off Hamas in decisive fashion, and the American backing necessary to truly cut Iran down to size.

This entails freeing Israel from the burden of providing “humanitarian aid” to an enemy in Gaza during wartime (as outgoing President Biden illogically has insisted, something that only has kept Hamas in power), and providing Israel with the massive ordnance required to destroy Iran’s nuclear bomb facilities.

Indeed, this is the year (even the season, winter-spring, meaning now) to tackle Iran, when it is at a nadir and before it goes fully nuclear. Iran’s proxies on Israel’s borders have been mostly eviscerated (see below) and Tehran has been stripped naked (by Israel) of its Russian-supplied air defense systems. President Trump can and probably will further weaken Iran with renewed “maximum sanctions.”

I cannot believe that Prime Minister Netanyahu will forgo the historic opportunity to complete his 25-year-long campaign against Iranian domination without a game-changing crushing blow on Iran, a pièce de resistance, which might also blessedly lead to regime change in that country.

In short, there is an opportunity at hand to overwhelmingly reset the regional strategic architecture beyond the knockback already delivered to Iran's so-called "Shiite arc" or "circle of fire" against Israel.

The dreaded Third Lebanon War is now essentially over, with Hezbollah having lost most of its heavy missiles and its political-military leadership including its all-powerful, longstanding leader. (I predicted the demise of Hassan Nasrallah and Yihye Sinwar. In 2022, I wrote that "Yihye Sinwar will go the way of Saleh al-Arouri and discover that there are no virgins waiting for him in the next world. Hassan Nasrallah will get the chance to make a similar discovery.")

Bashar Assad has been pushed out of power too, fleeing like a rat for his life from Syria to Russia. Might Abdul-Malik al-Houthi in Yemen and Abu Mohammed Al-Jolani in Syria be next?

The Turkish dictator Recep Tayyip Erdogan will demand significant attention over the coming year, meaning that somebody is going to have to counter his Ottoman-style hegemonic ambitions and ruthless inclinations. Already he has occupied a swath of northern Syria; he seeks to dominate the entire country (through Al-Jolani) and threaten Israel from there; and he is preparing to carry out genuine genocide against Kurdish forces and Kurdish civilians (not the fictitious genocide of which Erdogan has accused Israel) - unless Tayyip is stopped by Trump, and maybe Israel too.

AS I ACCURATELY predicted, the Israel's new peace treaties with the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco have held firm, despite the Biden administration's lack of enthusiasm for the Abraham Accords and despite the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon. This is the year that a tripartite US-Saudi-Israeli accord will be reached. It is one of Trump's top priorities and is well within reach.

Israel will have to swallow some bitter pills to facilitate this, like acquiescence to the US sale of F-35 fighter jets to Riyadh and acceptance of a US-backed Saudi civilian nuclear program. Netanyahu may also have to mutter something about a "pathway" to Palestinian independence in the distant future even though neither

he nor the Saudis believe this is feasible or sensible.

For Trump, everything is transactional, and so he will expect Israel to play ball regarding a Saudi deal along these lines. If Israel does so, it will be well placed to expect a return from Trump down the line on issues closer to home, ranging from Israeli assertion of sovereignty in parts of Judea and Samaria to pushback against nasty international organizations that are at Israel's throat.

Advocates of a strong America and an even stronger US-Israel alliance can only be thrilled about Trump's picks for key administration posts in defense (Pete Hegseth), national security (Michael Waltz, John Ratcliffe), and foreign affairs (Marco Rubio, Elise Stefanik, and Mike Huckabee). But remember: The likelihood that these people will serve four full years alongside Trump is negligible.

In his first term, Trump hired and fired his top lieutenants frequently. Remember H.R. McMaster, James Mattis, John Bolton, Michael Flynn, and Rex Tillerson? Only Mike Pompeo lasted a full term (first as CIA director and then as secretary of state), and alas he has not been given a senior post in the new administration.

Still on the international scene, hopefully this will be the year that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and Pope Francis will take early retirement. Each has tacked to the hard anti-Israel camp with a series of incendiary comments. Isn't it nice that the World Jewish Congress and European Jewish Congress awarded these very unfriendly figures with their highest awards in 2020 and 2022?

BACK AT HOME in Israel, last year I predicted that Israel would have to increase its defense budget from 60 to 90 billion shekels (from 16 to 25 billion dollars), with large chunks earmarked for a full year of combat in Gaza and Lebanon, long stints of military duty for reservists, rehabilitation of injured soldiers, massive production and stockpiling of ammunition, and for military strike planning on Iran.

Well, that is out the window. The defense budget this past year skyrocketed to NIS 190 billion (not including support for Israelis displaced from the Negev and Galilee), and in 2025 the budget will likely stand at NIS 150 billion (including the annual US defense package).

And that is before the Nagel Committee hits us this month with its recommendations for military restructuring and defense allocations for the next

decade. The committee is going to insist that Israel hike spending on defense from 5 to 7.5 percent of GDP, which means tens of billions of shekels more.

Those of us who yesterday completed eight days of saying the *Al HaNissim* prayer for miracles, can start today saying an *Al haMissim* prayer for help with handling the massive new taxes that will surely be our burden for years to come. (Nissim means miracles; Missim means taxes).

It would be nice to believe that the trauma and suffering of the past 15 months would shock the haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) community out of its crushingly insular shell and nudge it forward towards national service, but nada. It has not happened to any significant degree nor will it.

Haredi elders (inevitably they are 90+ year old scholars locked into an ideological framework that mistakenly posits spiritual primacy of their Torah study above all else) are incapable of adjusting to the realities and necessities of Jewish statehood.

I see no solution for this painful issue, no matter what draft/draft exemption law is passed in this Knesset or the next; no matter what sanctions are imposed on haredi families and institutions. This is an historic grand tragedy that has the potential to crash the modern State of Israel, no less, in the Heavens and on earth.

(I don't dismiss the slew of impressive efforts to integrate older haredi men and women in soft military and civilian-security frameworks, but this only nibbles at the edges of the need which is large-scale draft to the fighting army of 18-26-year-old haredi men.)

If there is hope on the horizon for Israel, it comes from those brave soldiers and their families, and from social activists and volunteers, who are the real heroes of the past 15 months of war.

I hope and pray that down the road - say, in 2028 elections - they will emerge as better unifiers with a vision of wholesome Israeli renaissance and nationalist resurgence. They are the proof that mainstream Israeli society is strong, its faith robust, and its grit undiminished.

Published in The Jerusalem Post 03.01.2025.

****The opinions expressed in Misgav publications are the authors' alone.****