

# Opinion For the First Time, Israel Faces an Adversary Too Powerful to Be Defeated

Iran is the most sophisticated, dangerous adversary Israel has ever faced. It has adopted a decades-long strategy of attrition until destruction. But Israel, frenetically focused on the here and now, lacks a systematic plan to confront it – and other crucial long-term national objectives.



Iranian men burn an Israeli flag, in a pro-Palestinian demonstration, under the Azadi (Freedom) tower, in Tehran, Iran. May, 15, 2012 AP

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- **Trump has no coherent strategy on Iran. Astonishingly, neither does Israel**
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Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei recently outlined a draft version of a vision for Iran for the next 50 years.

The vision calls for Iran to become one of the world's top five countries in science and technology, one of the top seven in "progress and justice," including eradication of poverty, corruption and discrimination, and one of the ten largest global economies. It further calls for strengthening Iran's defensive and deterrent capabilities, promoting Muslim unity, jihadism and Islamic liberation movements, and "vindicating" Palestinian rights.

Khamenei's overall objective is for Iran to gain regional, and even global,

supremacy, through technological self-sufficiency, and by resisting Western concepts of the international order, politics and culture. Khamenei asked Iran's academic and clerical establishments for feedback on the draft vision and directed the various branches of the government to turn its broad recommendations into actionable plans. A final draft is due within two years.



A man holds up a book of quotes from Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, outside Friday prayers at the University of Tehran in Tehran, Iran. Aug. 21, 2015 Bloomberg

One can legitimately ask whether a 50 year plan is at all feasible, especially in a world that is changing so rapidly. China has been somewhat more modest, recently announcing a vision for 2050, whereas the Saudis sufficed with a humble 2030. Iran itself failed to achieve an earlier 20 year vision, designed to turn it into a developed country by 2025. It may very well fail to do so again.

Nevertheless, Khamenei's attempt to craft such an actionable vision is bold and impressive. Under his leadership, Iran is at least trying to think systematically about its national objectives. He has set out bold, if heinous, plans before. In 2014 Khamenei announced a Nine Point Plan for Israel's destruction.

What if Israel were to adopt Khamenei's long-term approach and prepare 50 years out? What should those national objectives include? These are my suggestions.

**Preserving the national movement of the Jewish people.** Zionism achieved its primary objective, the establishment of the state, rapidly, but has lost its way. The paramount, and even existential decision we face today, is whether Israel's Jewish character is determined primarily by its borders, or population.

In 2060, the furthest demographic projections available, Israel's population will be 15.6 million, of whom 12 million will be Jewish – just 76%. This figure does not include the West Bank, in which case the combined population will only be about 60% Jewish, as it already is today.



Israeli border policemen stand by settlers near the Settlement of Ofra, in the west bank, on December 16, 2018, after settlers announced that they had begun to rebuild the Amona outpost. AFP

A state in which 40% of the population is not Jewish cannot be considered a Jewish state, even if we annex all of Judea and Samaria. The future of the Zionist enterprise depends on separation from the Palestinians. There is no need for a 50-year vision.

**Determining Israel's borders, peace with our neighbors and regional acceptance.** Israel's classic defense doctrine held that the conflict with the Arabs was unresolvable. In practice, during our first 70 years, we reached peace with Egypt and Jordan, conducted advance negotiations with the Syrians and Palestinians, now have growing ties with the Saudis and others and have become a regional fixture.

Peace with the Palestinians will transform Israel's regional and international status. It is not all up to us, but it does require a decision regarding our borders. During the next 50 years we must strive to complete the process of regional acceptance.

**Maintaining Israel's deterrence and security.** Iran is the most sophisticated and dangerous adversary Israel has ever faced. A theocracy with a long-term perspective, Iran recognizes that it cannot destroy Israel in the short term and has thus adopted a decades-long strategy of attrition until destruction.

Israel is a frenetic democracy, focused on the here and now. Although we can manage the conflict with Iran and defend ourselves successfully, Iran may simply be our first adversary that is too big and powerful to be defeated.

Israel must thus adopt a national security strategy best suited to this new kind of long-term confrontation, one of "strategic patience," based on maximal self-restraint, even in the face of significant provocations, and greater emphasis on defense (e.g. Iron Dome) and diplomacy. Offense would be resorted to when the other options have been exhausted, Israel can achieve significant periods of calm (5-10 years), at a price it is willing to pay, and maintain societal resilience.



A member of the Basij, volunteers under the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, holds a flag reading in Persian "Death to Israel." Azadi (Freedom) stadium in Tehran, Iran. Oct. 4, 2018 enei.ir, AP

A number of regional actors are now acquiring nuclear power reactors, for legitimate energy needs, but a similar project was the technological basis for

Iran's military nuclear program. It is thus increasingly likely that Israel will face the nightmare scenario of a multinuclear Mideast in the coming decades. Should this happen, Israel may be forced to contemplate a change its policy of nuclear ambiguity, seek a defense treaty with the U.S., or even consider regional disarmament, as fanciful as that sounds today.

**Promoting regional stability.** All of the forces that gave rise to the "Arab Spring" are still very much at work, even more so, including a population explosion, severe poverty and absence of economic opportunity, and political suppression. The Arab states are almost all in crisis, are at risk of becoming failed states, and have already caused a refugee crisis in Europe.

In 2007 an approximately 4 million Arab population lived near Israel's borders; by 2027, 20 million will live within 50 kms. Israel's thriving economy may prove a socioeconomic magnet that no border obstacle can withstand. Imagine 50 years from now.

Unlike Iran, Israel does not seek regional supremacy, certainly not global, but it does wish to influence critical regional processes such as these. It has two primary means of doing so: a settlement with the Palestinians, or even a reduction in the level of conflict, which would contribute to regional stability, as would a diplomatic campaign to promote a "Mideast Marshall Plan" designed to channel regional events in more positive directions.



A Palestinian protester carries a national flag during a demonstration near the border between Israel and Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip. December 21, 2018 AFP

It will cost the international community billions, but the alternative is for the Mideast to continue exporting its ills to Europe, a change in its fundamental character and even a conflict between the West and Islam.

**Preserving the "special relationship" with the U.S., a fundamental pillar of Israel's national security, despite alarming demographic and political trends.** New population groups are on the rise in the U.S. with little affinity towards Israel, especially Hispanics and the religiously non-affiliated, while the Jewish community, the second-largest in the world, is decreasing in size and influence.

By 2050 the Orthodox will constitute 25% of the U.S. Jewish community, up from 10% today, whereas Reform and Conservative Jews, the vast majority of American Jews and heretofore the pillar of support for Israel, are intermarrying and assimilating themselves out of existence. We are already witnessing a significant decline in support for Israel on the American left, and even among the Jewish community.



Members from the activist group Code Pink march to protest Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's planned speech to a joint meeting of Congress. March 3, 2015 Bloomberg

Israel should seek a formal alliance with the U.S., but also reduce its dependence on it, inter alia, by weaning itself off U.S. military aid, beginning in 2027, when the current ten-year military aid program ends. In 50 years, when we are 120, we must have long become fully independent. Nothing will contribute more to ensuring the long-term vibrancy of the "special relationship" than a settlement with the Palestinians.

**Achieving a just and progressive society.** Israel's projected population of 15.6 million in 2060 will include 4.15 million Haredim (ultra-Orthodox) and 3.6 million Israeli Arabs. Non-Haredim will comprise just 65% of the Jewish population, or 50% of the national total, income disparities and poverty will grow far worse, and the Haredi and Arab populations will become an untenable economic burden.

Much of the nation will look to various spiritual leaders, rather than the state, as their primary locus of authority, and will have little identification with its values. Maintaining a progressive democratic society, with equality before the law and respect for minority rights, will become very difficult.



An Ultra-Orthodox Jewish man stands at the headquarter of ultra-Orthodox mayoral candidate Yossi Daitch during the municipal elections in Jerusalem. Oct. 30, 2018 Oded Balilty, AP

If, like Khamenei, we wish to eradicate poverty and discrimination, we should be formulating a comprehensive long-term national strategy for a "war on poverty." The resources needed are great and poverty and discrimination can never be completely eradicated, but Israel has successfully pursued similarly ambitious national objectives in the past. A national strategy such as this would begin with a change in the absurd current policy which encourages population growth

primarily among the non-productive sectors of society.

**Maintaining Israel's stature as a world leader in science and technology.**

Just a few years ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced a limited national vision, that Israel become one of the world's top five cyber powers, an objective already met with great success, and he may now set a similar vision regarding artificial intelligence and big data.

One cannot, however, base a society solely on the high-tech sector. Our universities, and education generally, are at a low. Israel's qualitative edge generated its military, economic and spiritual strength in the past. We must invest in it again.

The public is focused today on other issues, possibly because the opioid of almost unlimited low-cost flights abroad has clouded our collective senses. If, however, we wish to chart our national course, not just be buffeted by the winds of change, we must prepare today. Iran's Supreme Leader has already begun doing so.

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