ISSN: 2717-0934 Vol.8 , No.2, Serial No. 28, Summer 2026 http://journal.iiwfs.com/

The Journal of Fundamental and Applied Studies of the Islamic World

https://doi.org/10.22034/fasiw.2026.245620

Article Type: Research paper

Abstract Extended Scenario Analysis of Iran-Israel Relations (2025-2035): Identifying Key Factors, Designing Future Scenarios, and Proposing Strategic Responses

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Article Info. **Received:** 27/07/2025 **Accepted:** 07/02/2026 **Available Online:** 31/10/2026

Extended Abstract

Introduction

The complex and tense relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the State of Israel is one of the main sources of instability in the Middle East. This rivalry, rooted in historical, ideological, and geopolitical factors, has evolved from a regional competition into a multifaceted strategic conflict with global implications. Understanding the potential future trajectories of this relationship is crucial for regional and international stability. Given the high level of uncertainty surrounding the key variables influencing this relationship, traditional forecasting methods are insufficient. Therefore, this study employs the Scenario Analysis methodology, a robust tool within Futures Studies, to explore plausible future states of Iran-Israel relations be-

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How to Site:
SadeqiBakyani,, A. (2026). Scenario Analysis of Iran-Israel Relations (2025-2035): Identifying Key Factors, Designing Future Scenarios, and Proposing Strategic Responses. *The Fundamental and Applied Studies of the Islamic World*, 8(2). 15-18.

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tween 2025 and 2035. This approach allows for the systematic exploration of uncertainty by constructing multiple, internally consistent, and plausible narratives about the future, moving beyond single-point predictions.

Methodology

This descriptive-analytical research adopts a futurology approach, specifically utilizing the Scenario Analysis method. The research process followed the standard steps of scenario planning: 1) Defining the topic and time horizon (Iran-Israel relations, 2025-2035), 2) Identifying key factors influencing the topic, 3) Analyzing uncertainty by selecting the two most critical and uncertain factors, 4) Designing scenarios based on the combinations of these key factors, 5) Analyzing and evaluating the plausibility and implications of each scenario, and 6) Formulating strategic responses for key stakeholders. The statistical population consisted of relevant academic and policy research sources in both Persian and English, including books, journal articles, think tank reports, and official documents related to Iran-Israel relations and Futures Studies methodology. Purposive sampling was employed to select the most relevant and credible sources. Data collection was primarily through library and documentary research. Content validity was ensured by relying on established academic sources and expert analyses. Construct validity was enhanced by grounding the analysis in recognized international relations theories and futures studies frameworks. Reliability was maintained by following a transparent and replicable methodological process based on established scenario planning literature (Schoemaker, 1995; Godet, 2000). Data analysis involved qualitative content analysis and conceptual analysis to identify key factors, understand their interconnections, and evaluate the implications of different future scenarios.

Results

The analysis identified several key factors influencing Iran-Israel relations up to 2035, categorized into ideological/historical, geopolitical/nuclear, security/cyber, economic, and great power dynamics. The two most critical and uncertain factors selected for scenario design were: 1) Iran's acquisition of nuclear capability, and 2) Israel's military response (or lack thereof) to such acquisition.

Based on these two axes, four distinct scenarios were developed:

Balance of Power World: Iran acquires nuclear capability, but Israel refrains from a large-scale military response. This scenario has a medium probability of occurrence. It implies a new regional equilibrium based on mutual deterrence.

Diplomacy and Limited Tension World: Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons, and Israel avoids large-scale military actions. This scenario, focusing on diplomacy and controlled tensions, has the highest probability of occurrence.

Hidden War World: Iran (potentially) acquires nuclear capability, and Israel responds with limited, indirect actions (cyber warfare, covert operations, proxy conflicts). This scenario has a high probability, reflecting the current trajectory of conflict.

Direct Confrontation World: Iran acquires nuclear capability, and Israel launches a large-scale, direct military response, potentially leading to open warfare. This scenario has a low probability due to the severe costs and risks involved, but it carries the most catastrophic consequences.

The findings suggest that the likelihood of a full-scale, direct war between Iran and Israel in the next decade is relatively low. However, the continuation of indirect conflicts, cyber operations, and limited tensions is highly probable. The "Diplomacy and Limited Tension" scenario represents the most stable outcome, while the "Direct Confrontation" scenario, although unlikely, poses an existential risk.

Conclusion

This scenario analysis provides a structured understanding of the potential futures for Iran-Israel relations. It confirms that while the risk of a devastating direct military confrontation exists, it remains relatively low. The most likely paths involve continued strategic competition through indirect means or managed tensions via diplomacy. The key drivers will be the trajectory of Iran's nuclear program and Israel's strategic calculations, heavily influenced by the positions and actions of major powers like the US, China, and Russia. The developed scenarios provide valuable insights for Iranian policymakers and other stakeholders. They highlight the importance of strategic foresight in managing this volatile relationship and suggest that proactive, adaptive strategies focusing on

deterrence, diplomacy, alliance management, and crisis prevention are essential for navigating the uncertainties ahead. Future research could refine these scenarios with quantitative probability assessments or explore shorter-term horizons.

Key words: Iran; Israel; Scenario Analysis; Future Studies; Middle East Conflict; Nuclear Program; Cyber Warfare.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.