

Israel-Iran Matrix Game

Background

There have been tensions in the Middle East every since the state of Israel was established on the lands of the Palestinians. The fabled "two-state solution" has never emerged, and there have been regular wars, both symmetric and asymmetric between Israel and its neighbours.

The latest round of conflict began in October 2023 when Hamas launched a series of atrocity attacks from Gaza across the border into Israel. The Israelis responded with a high intensity bombing and ground campaign which is still continuing a year later. There have been around 45,000 Palestinian civilian casualties and Hamas has probably ceased to exist as a significant force - but Israel is intent on its complete destruction. Hamas also still holds over 100 Israeli hostages - although many may no long be alive. The original intention for the Hamas attack remains unclear, but was possibly to provoke a region-wide war against Israel when the Israeli government over-reacted - as they did. A year later we seem to be on the verge of such a war.

Hezbollah, a larger terrorist organisation than Hamas and funded and equipped by Iran to near army standards, is based in Lebanon to the north of Israel. They have used the confrontation in Gaza to justify ongoing rocket attacks on Israeli settlements just south of the Lebanese border, and most Israeli civilians have fled from this area. Israel has conducted a series of remote assassination, by drone, missile or air strike, against the Hezbollah leadership and their key Iranian supporters. A strike against the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, the Syrian capital, led to Iran firing around 300 drones and missiles at Israel, almost all of which were shot down by Israeli air defence. In September 2024 the Israelis detonated thousands of pagers used by Hezbollah, followed by hundreds of radios - they had infiltrated the supply chain. On 27 September 2024, Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hezbollah, was assassinated in an Israeli airstrike on Beirut, the capital of the Lebanon. On 1st October Israel launched a ground invasion of the Lebanon with its army, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), avowedly with the intention of pushing Hamas back beyond the Litani River and so out of missile range of Israel's northern settlements, to which residents could then return. A 1982 invasion of the Lebanon by Israel which reached Beirut is largely seen as a costly failure, and not one that Israel would be keen to repeat. On the night of 1st October Iran launched another large missile attack on predominantly military targets in Israel. Although many missiles got through damage was apparently slight. Israel has vowed revenge.

Some particular issues to be aware of:

- The Lebanon is close to being a failed state, with no significant military of its own, a weak government and chaotic economy.
- Israel and Iran do not have a shared land border, being separated by Iraq.
- Hezbollah has been well penetrated by the Mossad, the Israeli secret service. Iran may also be badly penetrated.
- Iran is a religious dictatorship, although with some democratic trappings.
- Iran may have some nuclear capability, but is not yet believed to have a nuclear weapon, and Israel will be likely to attack any facility which is close to creating one.
- Israel may also have some nuclear capability - albeit as a last resort.

Current Situation

The current date is: 2 October 2024.

Challenge/Disagreement /Crux/Dissonance

The key issues, as of 2 October 2024 are:

- How will Israel respond to the latest round of missile attacks on Iran. And then how would Iran respond against Israel, and so on.
- To what extent can Israel declare the war on Hamas in Gaza done so as to free up more ground troops for the Lebanon, and to free up aircraft for use in Lebanon against Hamas and against Iran.
- If Israel takes the pressure off of Gaza then does Hamas become resurgent. How can Israel control the "peace" in Gaza?
- How far into the Lebanon will the current Israeli offensive go? Just to the Litani river, or beyond to Beirut if the opportunity presents itself and they can knock out Hezbollah once and for all.
- How will Iran respond to a growing war in the Lebanon? Can it do more than just launch missiles at Israeli territory. Can it send ground troops into Lebanon?
- Is there any chance of a ceasefire in Gaza, or the Lebanon, as the UN and most nations are calling for? Or are we entering a months, or even years long, new Middle East War?
- Is Hamas finally getting its wish of a coalition in active war against Israel?

Game Turns

Each game turn represents about 2 weeks of real time. Ensure that all actions are representative of what could be achieved in that amount of time.

The game plays for 6 turns, October 2024 to end December. The turns are:

- Turn 1, early October 2024
- Turn 2, late October 2024
- Turn 3, early November 2024
- Turn 4, late November 2024
- Turn 5, early December 2024
- Turn 6, late December 2024

Actors

Where a real leader is named below, base the player on what real information you know about them and their personalities. For other players create a random player character as per the standard instructions.

The actors/players and their aims are:

- Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel
 - To stay in power
 - To ensure the survival and future of the state of Israel

- To avoid a genocide of the Jewish people perpetrated by Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran and the "axis of resistance"
- To punish those who do wrong to the state of Israel and the Jewish people
- Not to accept a two-state solution
- Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran
 - To remain a religious dictatorship
 - To avenge those who attack Iran
 - To support Hamas and Hezbollah in their struggle against Israel
 - To avoid getting into a Total War with Israel
- Hezbollah
 - To avenge the murder of their leadership and fighters by Israel
 - To evict the Jews from Israel and return Palestine to the Palestinians
 - To protect their territory within Lebanon
- Hamas
 - To try and draw Iran, Hezbollah and the other nations and factions of the "axis of resistance" into an all-out war with Israel to evict Israeli's from Palestine and to regain the Palestinian homeland "from the river to the sea"
 - To ensure enough fighters stay alive in Gaza in order to mount continued resistance to any Israeli occupation and to regain Gaza if the opportunity arises.
- USA
 - To support Israel and its right to defend its territory and to punish any attackers
 - To try and avoid a full-scale war in the Middle East

Randomise player order each turn.

Reporting

Summarise each game at the end in 300 words or less. Also score Iran and Israel on scale of -5 to +5, where -5 means that they have suffered very badly and achieved no war aims, 0 means that they have achieved little but losses have been manageable, and 5 means that all war aims have been achieved for minimal casualties.