Foresight Case Study August 2021.

Question: "Will Israel and Iran Go to War over the Nuclear Issue during the Next Year?"

Narrative - Ambassador Michael Gfoeller (ret.) who ran these scenarios with ForsightAI, is a member of the board at Potentia Analytics and is an independent consultant on international politics and security matters who served as Senior Political Advisor to General Petraeus, then commander of U.S. Central Command.

I have recently used Foresight to examine the likelihood of war breaking out between Israel and Iran over the issue of Iran's nuclear program. I have studied this question by constructing several different matrices, which were designed to reflect the position, power, and salience values for the 15 most important regional and international leaders directly involved in determining the answer to this question. The overall result of this study is that the likelihood of war is very great within the next year.

The initial matrix was based upon the assumption that Israel remains unwilling to accept a nuclear-armed Iran, even as Iran continues to be determined to develop nuclear weapons. These assumptions are widely accepted in the Middle East. At the same time, I assumed that the current administration in the United States is very much opposed to the outbreak of war between these two countries. For these reasons, I assigned very high position numbers to the Iranian and Israeli leaders, and a very low position number to the US President. Assuming that the issue of war or peace is by far the most important one for both Iranian and Israeli leaders, I assigned very high salience numbers to them. Assuming that it is of significant but not overwhelmingly great importance to the current US administration, I assigned a moderate salience value to the US President.

The results of the first round of calculation were remarkable: after only two rounds, Foresight assigned a value of 81 to the outbreak of war between Israel and Iran. This means that war between these two states sometime in the next twelve months is very probable, under the scenario defined by the first matrix.

The second matrix was nearly identical to the first, with one key difference: the salience value for the US President was increased from 49 to 100. This reflects an assumption that avoiding war between Israel and Iran is the most important issue for the United States, unlike in the first matrix. Under this scenario, Foresight assigned a value of 80 to the outbreak of war between Israel and Iran. In other words, despite a dramatic shift in the attitude of the US, war remained extremely likely. Unlike the first scenario,

Foresight took eight complete rounds to reach this result. This indicates that enhanced US interest and engagement in this issue would complicate and perhaps lengthen the sequence of events leading to war, without, however, changing the result.

In the third matrix, the position number for all three Israeli leaders was lowered from 80 to 50. This symbolized a dramatic reduction in their readiness to use military force to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. All other factors remained as in scenario two. In the third scenario, Foresight assigned a value of 66 to the outbreak of war. Thus, even assuming that Israel's leaders are far less willing to use military force than seems to be the case, war remains extremely likely. The key factor behind this result is the very strong position assumed by Iran's leaders with respect to their nuclear program.

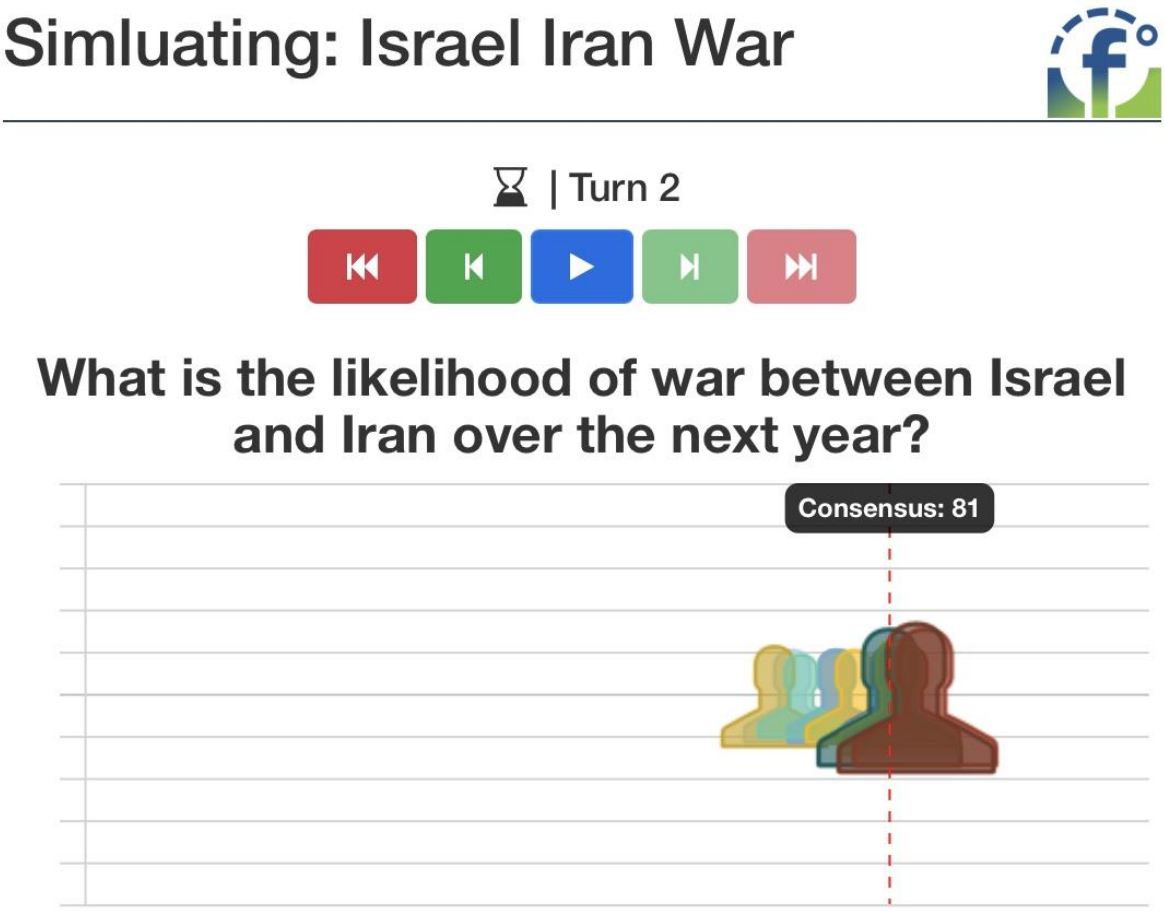
This conclusion was reinforced by the fourth matrix, in which the assumption was adopted that Israel's leaders wanted to avoid war with Iran at all costs. Their position number fell from 50 to 10. In this scenario, just as in scenarios two and three, the US remained very committed to avoiding war as well. Thus, the policies of the US and Israeli were consistent and pacific in orientation. Even under these assumptions, Foresight assigned a value of 58 to the outbreak of war, after 13 moves. Such an outcome indicates that the outbreak of war would remain likely even if both Washington and Tel Aviv were both strongly opposed to war.

Only in the fifth matrix does the likelihood of peace slightly exceed that of war. In this scenario, the position number assigned to the Iranian leaders falls to 50, a level indicating that they would be just as inclined to resolve the nuclear through negotiation as through war. Under this assumption, with all other values remaining the same as in scenario four, Foresight assigned a value of 45 to the outbreak of war, after just two moves. It is essential to note that even in this scenario, war remains very likely. In other words, even if one assumes, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that Israel would prefer to avoid war with Iran over its nuclear program at all costs, and that Iran is very willing to prefer diplomacy to war in resolving this issue, the probability of war remains very high.

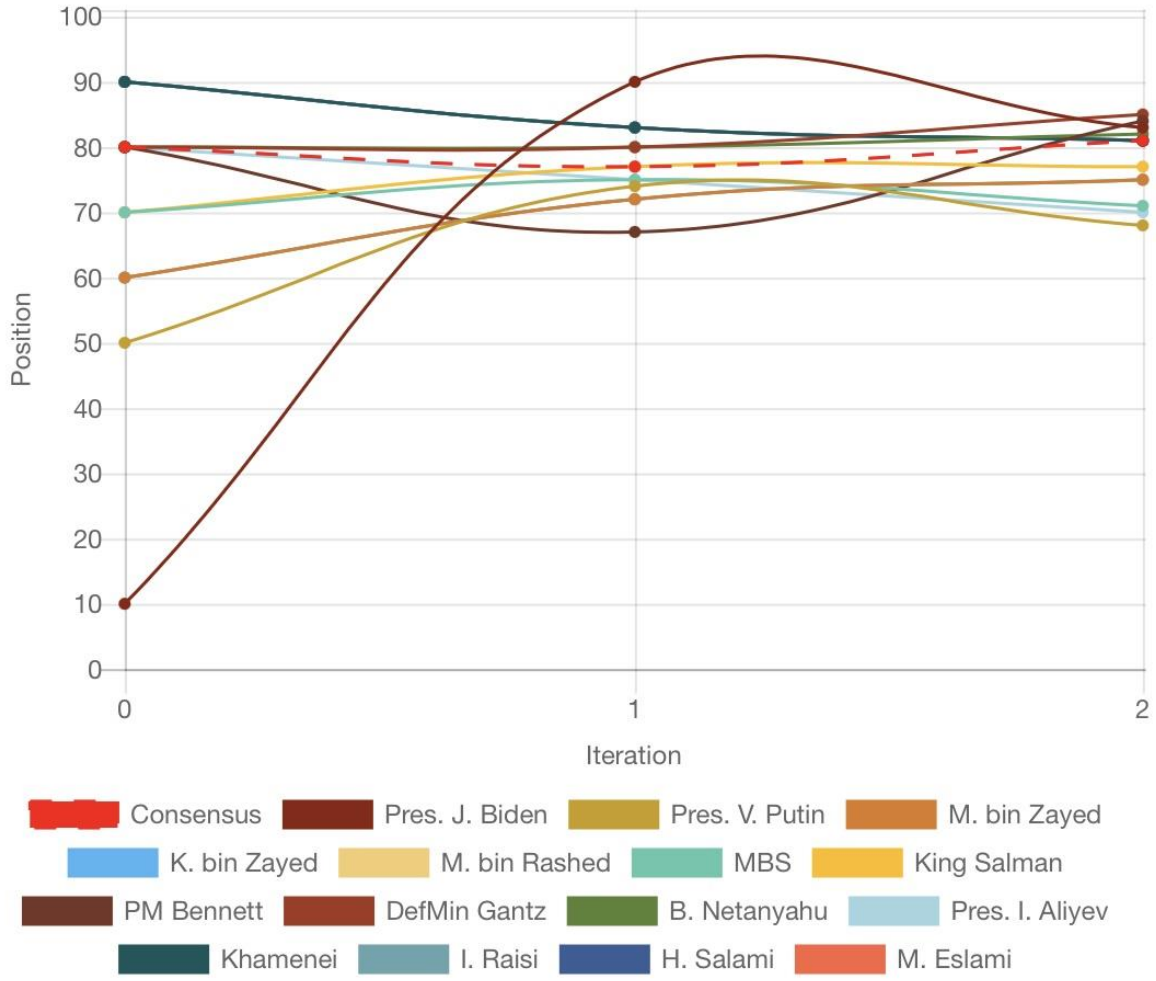
In conclusion, war between Israel and Iran over Iran's nuclear program seems to be very likely sometime in the next year. The positions of the US seems to have little to no influence over this situation. Even dramatic and inherently unlikely shifts in Israeli policy would increase the chance of a peaceful outcome to only a limited degree. Iran's position in this potential conflict is the decisive factor. Only a dramatic shift in the attitude of the Iranian regime toward its nuclear program would render a fragile peace slightly more likely than a destructive war.

Charts:

Scenario One



Position Timeline



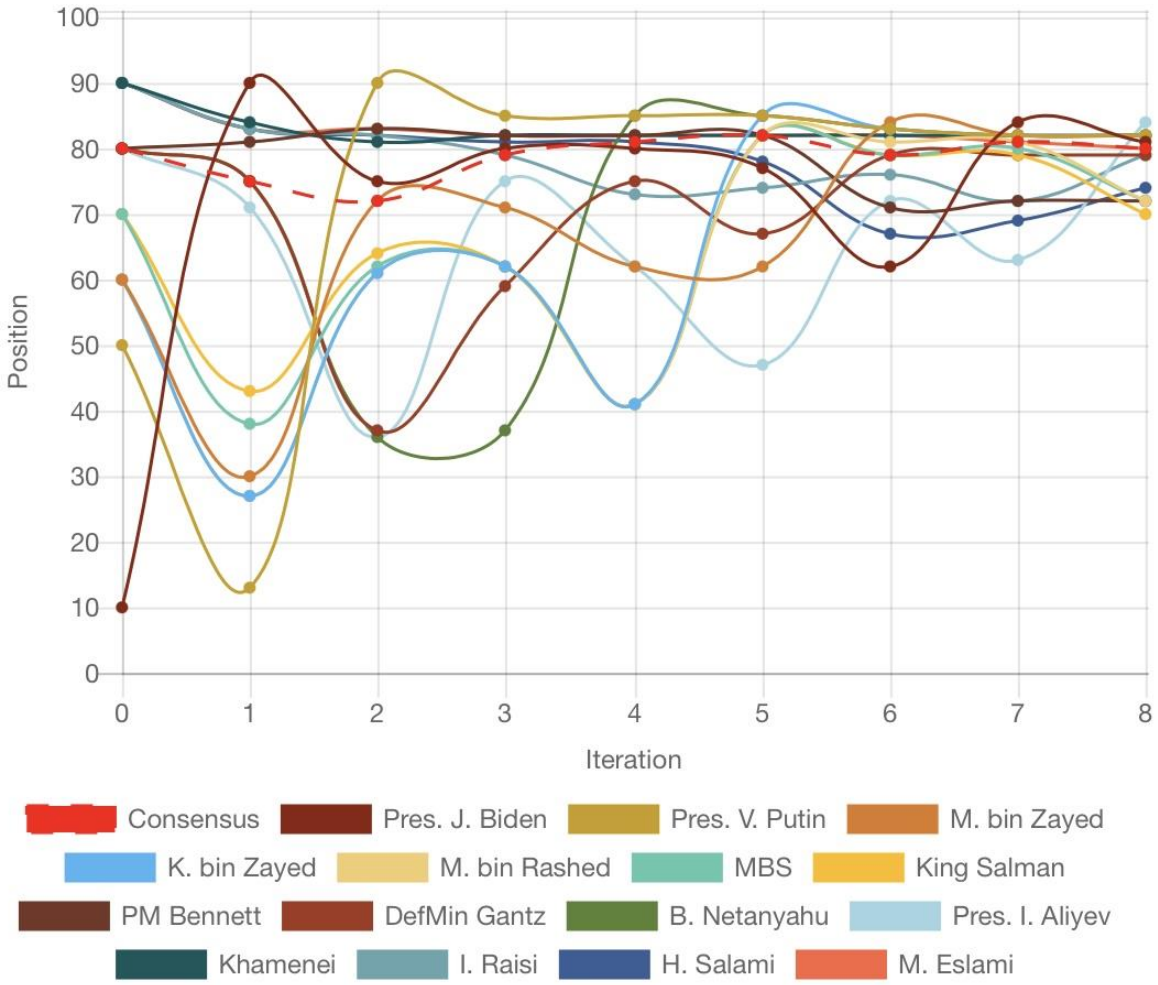
Scenario Two

Simluating: Israel and Iran War 2

| Turn 8

What is the likelihood of war between Israel and Iran over the next year?

Position Timeline

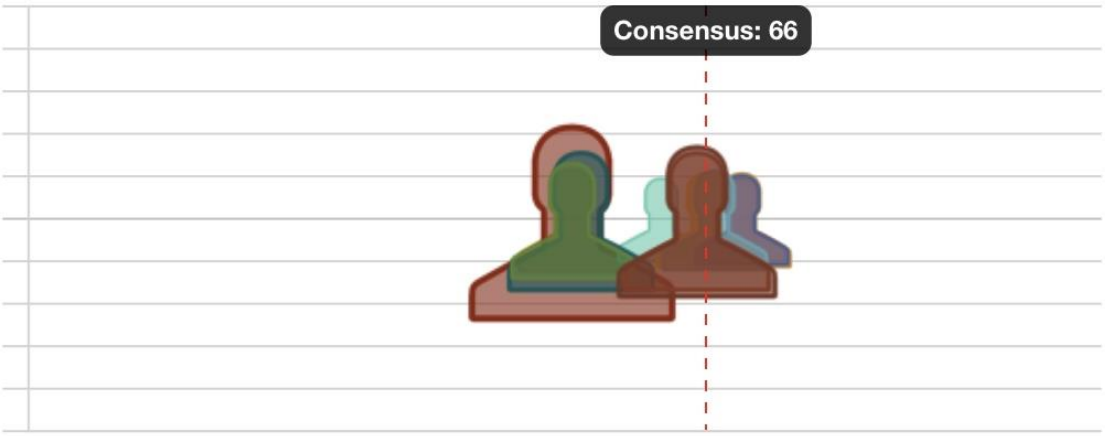


Scenario Three

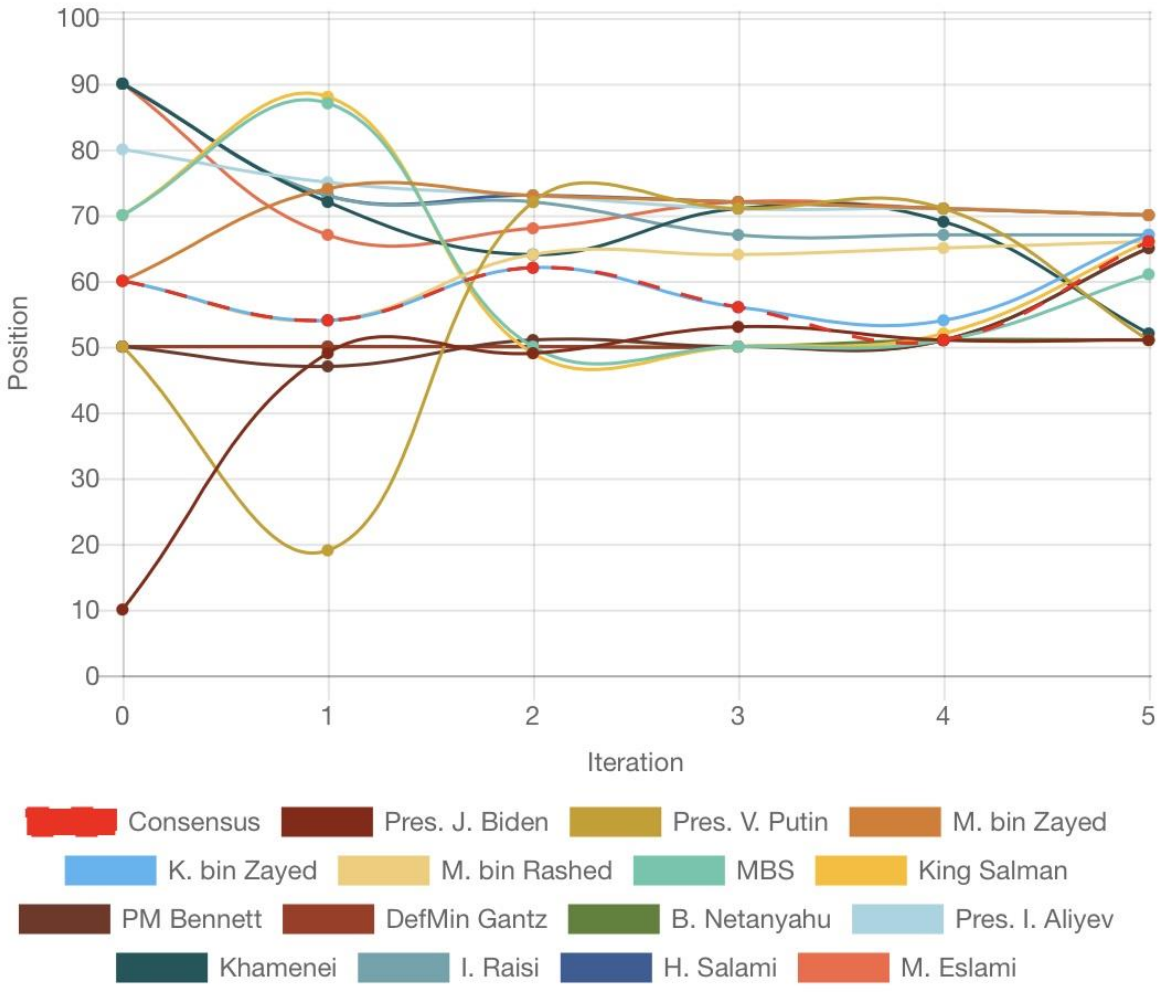
Simluating: Israel and Iran War 2 (1)

| Turn 5

What is the likelihood of war between Israel and Iran over the next year?



Position Timeline

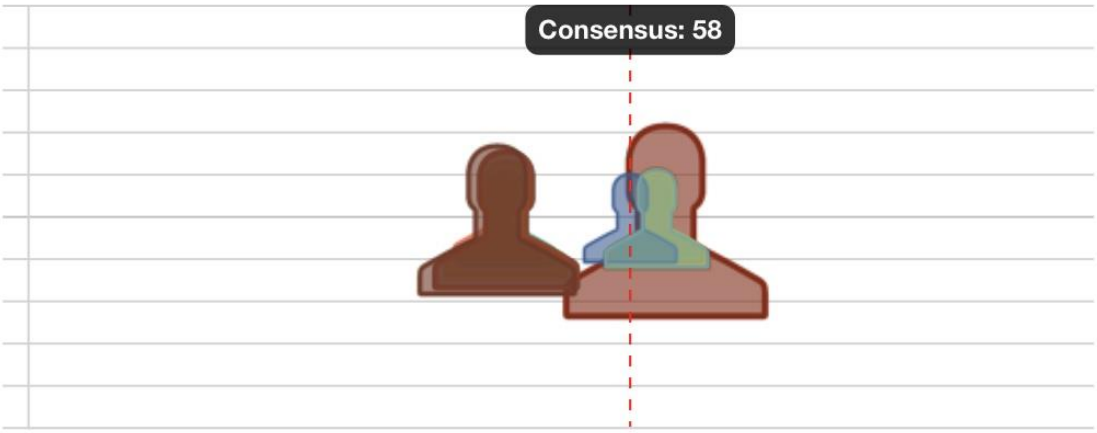


Scenario Four

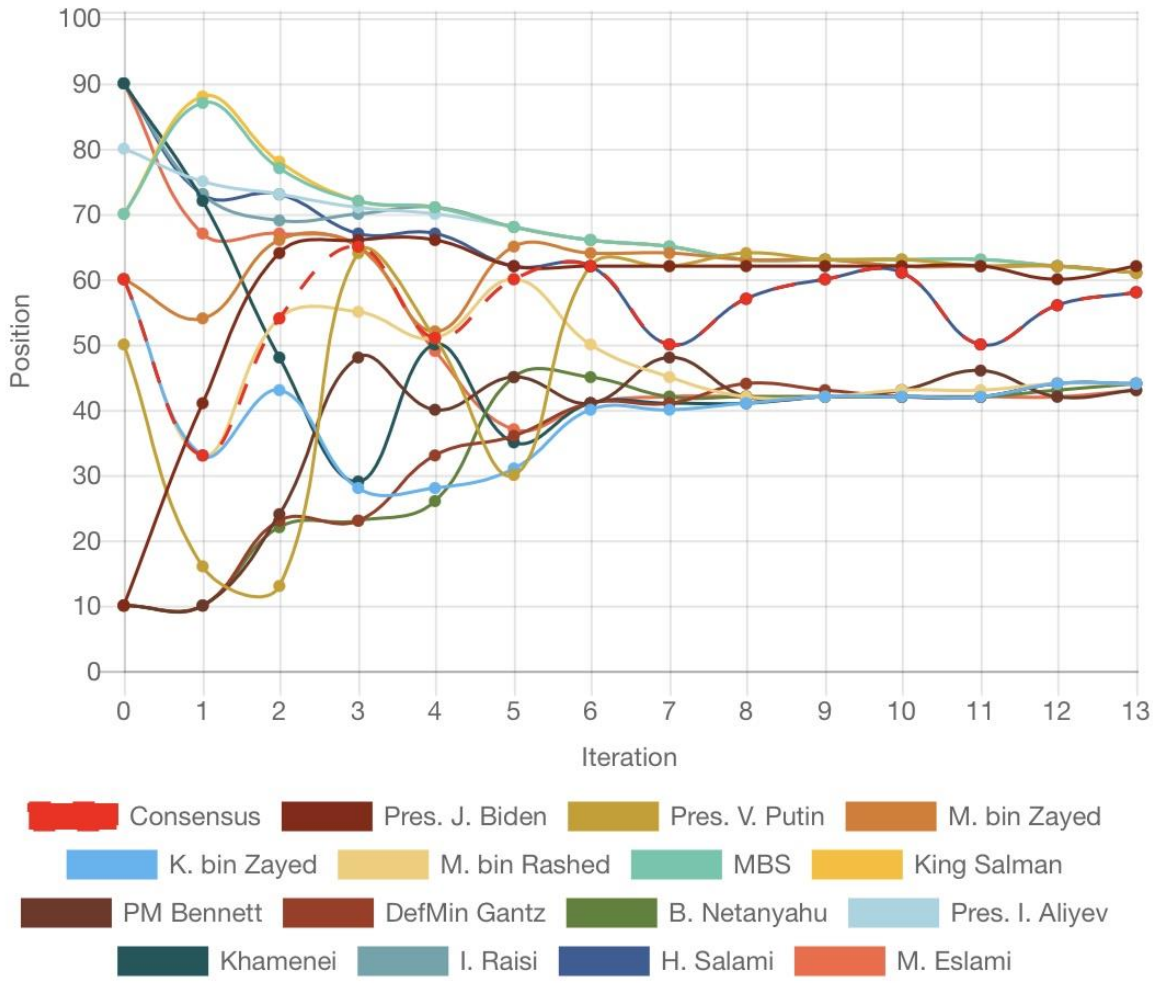
Simluating: Israel and Iran War 2 (1) (1) (1)

| Turn 13

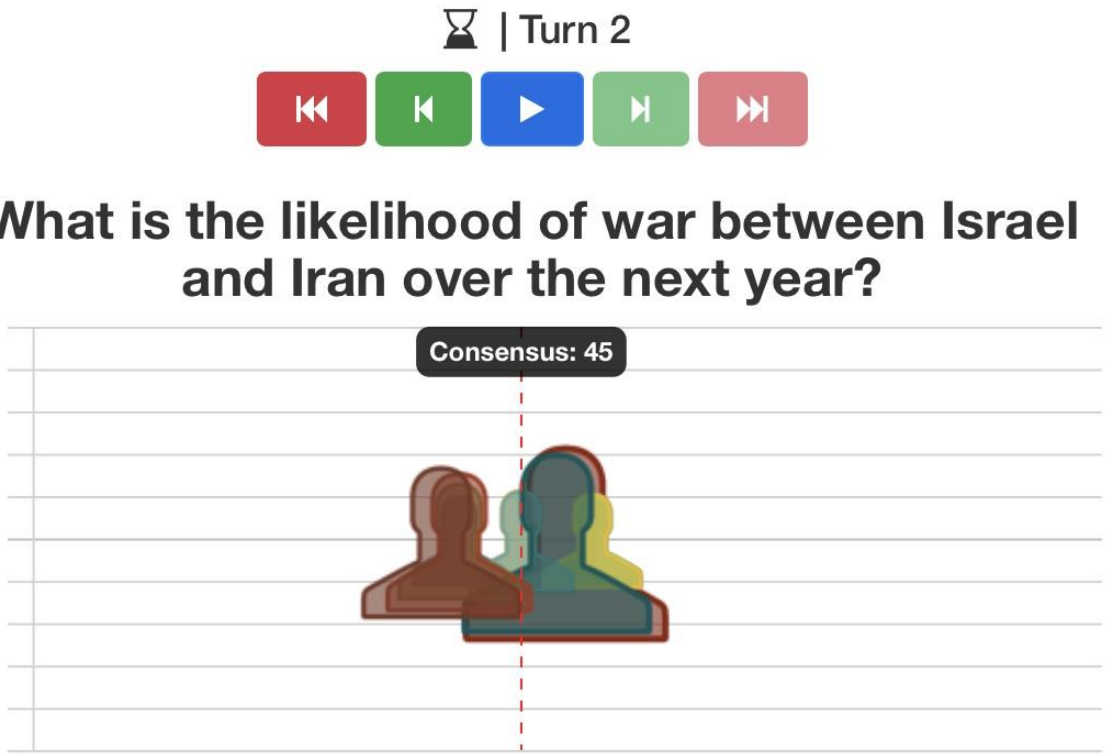
What is the likelihood of war between Israel and Iran over the next year?



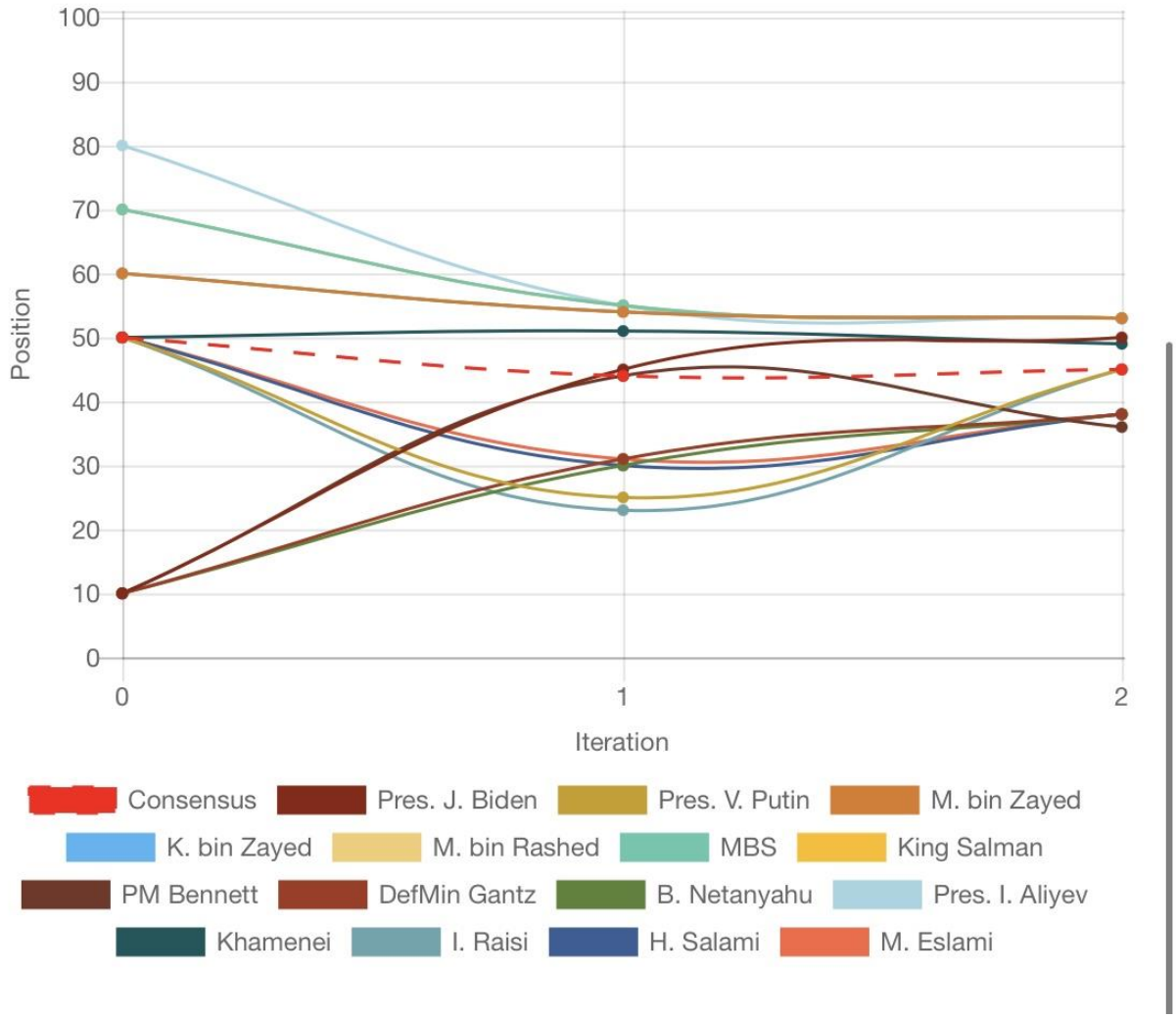
Position Timeline



Scenario Five



Position Timeline



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amb. Michael Gfoeller (ret.) is an independent consultant on international politics and security matters.

He served for 26 years (1984 to 2010) as a US Foreign Service Officer. His career included service in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Manama, Bahrain; Iraq; Moscow, Russia; Yerevan, Armenia; Chisinau, Moldova; Warsaw, Poland; and Brussels, Belgium. From 2004 to 2008, he served as Deputy Chief of Mission and Charge' d'Affaires at the US Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

He served for two years (2008-2010) as the Senior Political Advisor to General David Petraeus, then Commander, US Central Command. He retired from the State Department with the rank of Ambassador. His foreign languages include Arabic, Russian, French, and German.

Amb. Gfoeller is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Cosmos Club, the Union League Club of New York, and a Board Member of Potentia Analytics. He is also a Founding Partner of Arabia Analytica, LLC.

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