

The 2014 Gaza War

Rethinking Operation Protective Edge

by Eitan Shamir

On July 8, 2014, in response to a barrage of rockets and missiles on its population centers from the Gaza Strip, Israel launched heavy air and artillery strikes against the Islamist terror group Hamas that had ruled the area since 2007. As these failed to stop the attacks, on July 17, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) invaded the Strip in strength. After three weeks of heavy fighting, the IDF withdrew to the international border and sustained the air campaign until a cease-fire came into effect on August 26.



A house is destroyed by a Hamas rocket in Beersheba, July 2014. In the preceding year-and-a-half, Hamas fired some 200 rockets and mortar shells from Gaza while in the three weeks attending the abduction of three Israeli youths in June 2014, they fired another 232.

Operation Protective Edge, as the campaign was codenamed, was Israel's third war against Hamas in five years, and, unlike the previous two encounters, its outcome has been far from conclusive. While Hamas sustained heavy casualties, and its military capabilities were seriously degraded, it tenaciously fought against a superior enemy and managed to subject most of Israel's population to constant rocket and missile attacks for seven full weeks. With both sides claiming victory and Palestinian-Israeli relations on a downward spiral, a fourth Gaza war seems only a matter of time.

Slide to War

The conflict was triggered by the abduction and murder of three Jewish teenage hitchhikers in the West Bank by a team of Hamas terrorists on June 12, 2014.¹ With Israel arresting and interrogating hundreds of suspects, Hamas launched a massive rocket and mortar assault from the Gaza Strip on Israeli population centers: If in the preceding year-and-a-half the Palestinians fired some 200 rockets and mortar shells from Gaza, in the three weeks attending the abduction, they fired another 232.² Jerusalem responded with pinpoint air strikes at launcher teams hoping to quickly end the attacks, only to see Hamas escalate the fight, leaving the Israelis no choice but to launch a full-scale military campaign.

On a deeper level, the eruption was a corollary of Hamas's dire financial crisis and growing political isolation. Officially, the border between Gaza and Egypt has been closed since the group's 2007 takeover of Gaza. But unofficially, goods have been transferred into Gaza via numerous tunnels dug between the Egyptian and Strip sections of the Rafah border town. The bustling trade reached its peak with the advent of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood regime, Hamas's parent organization. The revolution in Egypt and the rising wave of Islamism in the Arab world transformed the Sinai Peninsula into a no-man's land, exploited both for increased smuggling operations and the creation of a base for training and

maintaining weapons arsenals far from Israel's watchful eyes.³

The restoration of military rule under Field Marshal Abdel Fatah al-Sisi and his subsequent election as president were disastrous for Hamas. The new regime considered the organization an ally of the hated Brotherhood and other Islamist groups attacking Egyptian troops in Sinai. In the summer of 2013, Sisi retaliated by shutting Hamas's smuggling tunnels, approximately halving its annual revenues.⁴ In addition, Iran's donations to Hamas had already been drastically cut as a result of the group's support of the Syrian Islamist Sunni rebels fighting the Tehran-supported Assad regime.⁵

Thus, by late 2013, Hamas was finding it difficult to pay salaries and fund government services to Gaza's population. It tried to solve this problem through reconciliation with Fatah and, in April 2014, formed a unity government headed by the latter in the hope that the arrangement would provide salaries for Gaza's government employees.⁶ However, wishing to exploit its sudden advantage to further weaken Hamas in the internal Palestinian political struggle, the Fatah-dominated government provided salaries only to non-Hamas members. Under

¹ CNN, [Aug. 23, 2014](#).

² "[Monthly Summary-June 2014](#)," Israeli Security Agency, Tel Aviv; "[Monthly Summary-July 2014](#)," *idem*.

³ Yoram Schweitzer, Shlomo Brom, and Shani Avita, "Terror Strikes again in Egypt," *INSS Insight*, The Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv, Feb. 4, 2014.

⁴ Eric Trager, "Sisi's Egypt and the Gaza Conflict," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., July 14, 2014; *YNET News* (Tel Aviv), [July 27, 2014](#).

⁵ Hillel Frisch, "The Flimsy Palestinian 'Unity' Government," *Perspective Papers*, no. 251, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA Center), Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, June 26, 2014.

⁶ *Ibid*.

these desperate circumstances, Hamas's leadership felt compelled to use force against Israel to enhance the organization's nationalist credentials and boost its strategic posture.

From the Israeli point of view, Operation Protective Edge can be divided into three main phases. The first consisted of pinpoint air strikes (July 8-17) while the second included the ground incursion into Gaza (July 17-August 4) with a view to degrading Hamas's capabilities in general and destroying its extensive network of offensive tunnels in particular. Having claimed to achieve these goals, including the destruction of thirty-two tunnels, the IDF withdrew to the international border and sustained air raids while negotiating a ceasefire through the Egyptian mediators.

The Israeli government considered but rejected a full-scale invasion of Gaza, wishing to avoid a large number of Israeli military and Palestinian civilian casualties, and because of the lack of a clear exit strategy.⁷ Keenly aware of this, Hamas felt it could act with impunity, sustaining its attacks on Israeli population centers. On August 26, apparently beginning to feel the pressure, Hamas accepted a month-long ceasefire with no preconditions, which has been sustained as of this writing. As a minor concession, Israel agreed to increase the size of the fishing-zone of Gaza's fishermen.

Military Lessons

Prior to Operation Protective Edge, the IDF was forced to make some decisions

⁷ Haaretz (Tel Aviv), Aug. 6, 2014.



Thousands of mourners attended the funeral of Hadar Goldin, one of 45 Israeli fatalities during Operation Protective Edge. Another 700 IDF soldiers were injured as ground fighting proved much fiercer than anticipated.

regarding its future force structure as a result of a shrinking budget. In effect, the IDF had to choose between one of two options: strengthen its relative weaknesses (maneuver-oriented ground forces) or, conversely, increase its relative strengths (standoff fire, precision fire, intelligence, cyber, and special forces). The IDF apparently chose the second course of action, but the consequences for its standing and reserves ground forces would be significant: cutting back supply plans for the Namer APC (armored personnel carrier); delaying the Merkava 5 tank projects; closing armor, artillery, and aircraft units; and dramatically reducing training. The ground forces could have found themselves in dire straits as they did prior to the 2006 Lebanon war.⁸

⁸ Amir Rapaport, "[Katan Vehacham](#)," NRG News (Tel Aviv), May 18, 2013; Eado Hecht and Eitan Shamir, "[Neglect of IDF Ground Forces](#): A Risk to Israel's Security," *Perspectives Papers*, no. 225, BESA Center, Dec. 4, 2013.

The assumption behind this decision was that the ground forces' unique capabilities would become less relevant to defeating future threats and were, therefore, no longer necessary in such strengths. Instead, it was decided that accurate, long-range fire and special forces raids aimed through precise intelligence could rapidly destroy the enemy's capabilities. However, this assumes the ability to anticipate the nature of these threats, such as the prediction that the IDF will not face a symmetrical enemy (a large-scale, regular army). Rival armies do exist, but the IDF planners assumed they would not be used.⁹ Forecasting the future is always difficult, but Israeli military planners envisioned a repeat of previous operations whereby Israel's air supremacy pressed rivals to seek ways to end the conflict. Operation Protective Edge failed to live up to these expectations.

Ground fighting proved much fiercer than anticipated. In Operation Cast Lead (December 2008-January 2009), when Israeli ground troops entered Gaza, Hamas ground forces fled. This time, they fought to defend the tunnel system. Israeli forces searching for the tunnels inside Gaza suffered approximately 700 casualties—45 of them fatal; still, casualties among Palestinian fighters were significantly higher.¹⁰ While the Israelis searched for the tunnels, Hamas conducted three raids into Israel via yet undiscovered tunnels. Most of the raiders were killed, but the IDF suffered casualties.

Operation Protective Edge was not a repeat of previous campaigns where Israel's air supremacy pressed rivals to end the conflict.

The ground battle did not stop the firing of Palestinian rockets and missiles, but it did reduce it considerably.¹¹ Hamas also made two amphibious raids conducted in the first days of the war. Both were detected, and all the participants killed.

The IDF is now studying the operation in order to improve force structure and readiness with an eye to the future and other fronts. A number of IDF teams are conducting investigations on operational and tactical levels. Each inquiry team is assigned to investigate a defined area of operations such as intelligence, command and control, stand off and artillery support, inventory management, and others.¹² Some of these areas could be of interest to other Western militaries that are engaged with similar enemies in the Middle East. Hamas is a relatively well-led, equipped, and trained organization. While not as sophisticated as its role model Hezbollah, it is more capable than many other jihadist groups in the Middle East.

Two important lessons are that air operations and standoff fire are not enough to decisively win a conflict and that ground combat is necessary against adaptable enemies like Hamas. Ground combat requires excellent capabilities in combined arms/joint fire, maneuver, and protection. The utility of heavy tanks and well-protected armored personnel carriers was proven beyond question. Active protection systems installed on armored vehicles, such as the "Trophy"

⁹ Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, chief of staff, IDF, presentation, "2020 Vision: Israel's Perils and Prospects," BESA Conference, Ramat Gan, Oct. 13, 2013.

¹⁰ *Walla News* (Tel Aviv), [July 26, 2014](#).

¹¹ "[Monthly Summary-July 2014](#)."

¹² Brig. Gen. Tamir Hayman, IDF Training and Doctrine at GHQ, "Operation Protective Edge: Military and Political Lessons," presentation, BESA Center, Sept. 29, 2014.

system, were baptized under fire and proved their ability to decrease casualties in areas saturated with anti-tank missiles. Consequently, the IDF has overturned the decision to cut its heavy armored personnel carrier program, the Namer program, and is now shifting budget priorities to purchase more units.¹³ This decision to acquire more heavy APCs came at the expense of the U.S.-built V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft designed to carry special forces deep into enemy territory.¹⁴

Other lessons included the necessity of joint operations in dense urban areas that contain developed systems of tunnels and underground passageways.¹⁵ Another is the importance of tactical digital command and control systems and the effective dissemination of tactical intelligence. In the

2006 Lebanon war, a number of units suffered from a lack of tactical intelligence; in Gaza, commanders at times complained that they were flooded with too much information, partly the result of integration of novel communication and information systems. The IDF is now seeking the correct balance. Other important areas of study are media management and the issue of lawfare (pursuit of strategic aims through aggressive legal maneuvers). One lesson has already been implemented: The IDF now employs teams of senior reserve officers to investigate specific incidents or areas of concern and swiftly submit reports for IDF command to respond or change a certain course of action such as the use of artillery fire in populated areas.¹⁶



A Hamas terrorist crouches in a tunnel. The IDF learned important lessons on how to detect and destroy tunnels during the 2014 operation. Much of what was done was improvised and will now become institutionalized.

Important lessons also included ways to use technologies and doctrine to detect and destroy tunnels. Much of what was done during the 2014 operation was improvised and will now become institutionalized. The operation also revealed issues with inventories of certain weapons. Consequently, the IDF has decided to increase its stockpiles and to search for improved ways of managing the rates of fire during such operations.¹⁷

The Iron Dome missile defense systems have withstood their greatest test to date.

¹³ YNET news (Tel Aviv), [Sept. 22, 2014](#).

¹⁴ *The Times of Israel* (Jerusalem), [Oct. 30, 2014](#).

¹⁵ Hayman, "Operation Protective Edge: Military and Political Lessons," Sept. 29, 2014.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Amir Rapaport, "The Military Campaign," presentation, BESA Center, Sept. 29, 2014.

Despite thousands of rockets and missiles that were launched against population centers, only two Israeli civilians were killed. Overall, the system destroyed 90 percent of incoming rockets and missiles.¹⁸ Iron Dome could not provide defenses to villages close to the Gaza border, which suffered from continuous mortar fire. However, the proven effectiveness of Iron Dome batteries that intercepted most incoming rockets allowed most normal daily life and economic activity to continue. The rocket and missile attacks' only notable success was the two-day partial suspension of incoming international flights to Israel after a rocket fell close to Ben-Gurion Airport.

The war also witnessed the first Hamas attempt to infiltrate Israeli airspace with a drone, which was intercepted by a Patriot missile.¹⁹ There is no doubt that in the future there will be more attempts to use drones. The IDF is therefore planning to equip itself with more Iron Dome batteries and to develop technologies to counter mortar fire.²⁰

Greater Challenges Ahead

Despite these important lessons, there are obvious limits to the lessons from this operation. Hamas is the weakest among Israel's enemies, and in the case of a war in two or more fronts or against a stronger

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The Gaza fighting was against a small enemy, waged entirely within the confines of a small, crowded space. The enemy was largely isolated and was denied any external aid during the course of the fighting. Israel committed its entire air force against this small strip of land and sent large ground force formations in a limited incursion. This was not a real maneuver but a simple forward advance along the front lines. True, the enemy was expecting it and prepared defensive positions, but while small units' engagements were fierce, this was not a full-scale war.

There were never any logistical problems because all the fighting was conducted within close proximity to Israeli supply bases. There was also no difficulty evacuating casualties from the front lines to medical centers within Israel. Fire support was available as combat units were constantly within the range of the artillery units deployed in advance. The enemy was largely static, and it lacked advanced equipment such as communication systems, air defense missiles, and anti-tank capabilities, which Hezbollah possesses.

The IDF soldiers, on the platoon level and even company level, experienced bitter and intense fighting. In contrast to the 2008-09 war, Hamas was not surprised and was ready to fight and defend its territory. Additionally, the tough, dense, urban terrain posed severe challenges in tactical terms—crowded built-up areas equipped with extremely well-dug tunnels.

¹⁸ Uzi Rubin, "The Performance of the Air Defense System," presentation, BESA Center for Strategic Studies, Ramat Gan, Sept. 29, 2014.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Yaakov Amidror, "[Fight Not the Last War](#)," *Perspectives Papers*, no. 273, BESA Center, Ramat Gan, Oct. 20, 2014.

These characteristics created chaos and made it difficult for IDF commanders to direct their troops.

Hamas defenses included improvised explosive devices (IEDs), booby traps, mines, snipers, and mortar and anti-tank missile squads. In 2008-09, IDF units faced similar situations, when, according to a paratrooper brigade commander, “There were IEDs, tunnels, and booby traps everywhere. Entire streets were covered with wires connected to IEDs.”²² Some of the lessons from previous operations in urban areas in the West Bank, Gaza, and Lebanon were implemented, such as the use of combined teams of dogs (*Oketz* unit), bomb demolition squads, and elite infantry units to clear the way.

One of the positive aspects of the operation was the return of the IDF to its forward command tradition and “follow me” motto. During the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, the IDF was criticized for subscribing to a so-called “plasma screen culture,” that is, excessive trust in digital command and control systems, and a command-style that resulted in commanders sitting in headquarters instead of leading at the front.²³ In the 2008-09 war, IDF commanders had begun to display different behaviors, but the real test came in 2014 when IDF commanders showed that the army had shed its previous bad habits and returned to its honored traditions of leadership. As always, the price was a high percentage of

commanders among the casualties.²⁴

But matters must be kept in proportion. The IDF outnumbered Hamas 3:1 and enjoyed close fire and intelligence support. The challenge was, therefore, not whether it accomplished its mission, but rather when and at what cost in human life. Another challenge that weighed on commanders’ minds was the threat of a kidnapped soldier with a repeat of the Corp. Gilad Shalit affair. Indeed, Hamas spared no effort plotting such an outcome. In the heat of battle, it was able to snatch the remains of two Israeli soldiers but failed in attempts to capture a live soldier.



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²² Haertzi Levi, quoted in *Yedi'ot Aharonot* (Tel Aviv), Jan. 23, 2009.

²³ Winograd National Inquiry Commission into the Second Lebanon War, Jerusalem, Apr. 2007, p. 402.

²⁴ The Times of Israel, [Aug. 28, 2014](#).

Strategic Implications

Relative to previous rounds of intense fighting between Israel and Hamas, this bout was much more painful to both sides as casualties and damage were significantly higher. Furthermore, Jerusalem was unable to land a decisive knock-out blow. Instead, wishing to prevent a large number of collateral Palestinian civilian casualties, and protected from the direct effects of the Palestinian missile barrage by the Iron Dome, an efficient warning system and numerous bomb-shelters, the Israelis adopted a strategy of gradual attrition of Hamas military infrastructure. However, attrition comes with a price. Instead of a short operation, the fighting lasted fifty days. Lengthy operations go against Israel's security doctrine as well as military planning. As a whole, the IDF is designed for quick and decisive operations, at least in theory.²⁵

Casualties remain a major issue in the propaganda contest between the rivals and all figures should be regarded critically. According to Hamas, the fighting resulted in approximately 2,200 killed and 11,000 wounded in Gaza. It claimed that more than 75 percent of the dead were civilians. In contrast, Israel claimed that approximately half the dead were combatants and that many civilian deaths were caused by deliberate Hamas exposure of non-combatants to Israeli fire as human shields.²⁶ Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians fled combat areas, and thousands of buildings were destroyed—especially in the area of the ground incursion. The Hamas rocket and

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missile arsenal was drastically degraded, and its offensive tunnels and some defensive tunnels were destroyed. Israeli sources estimate that at

least 15 percent of Hamas's military personnel were killed or wounded, including a number of high-ranking individuals. On the Israeli side, 14 civilians and 67 soldiers were killed, and approximately 400 civilians and 705 soldiers were wounded. A few buildings were destroyed, and a few hundred were damaged, most of them superficially.

Over the past twenty years, Jerusalem has conducted a number of operations based mostly or exclusively on standoff firepower. The last, Operation Pillar of Defense in November 2012, achieved its political goals. But part of that success was due to the visible preparation of a ground invasion that had a deterrent effect. Furthermore, the airstrike portion of that operation was not entirely successful; it destroyed almost all of the long-range rocket and missile launchers, but Hamas still fired 1,500 rockets and missiles into Israel. Without the Iron Dome's spectacular success, only a ground offensive or political surrender would have stopped the rockets. Against a small enemy confined in Gaza, the combination of Iron Dome and air strikes was sufficient in the past to induce a positive result.

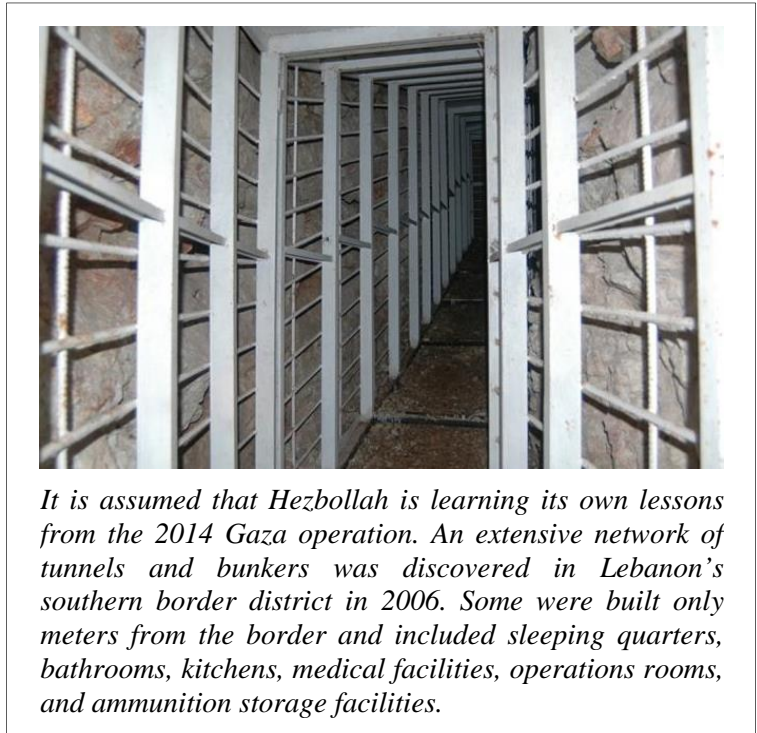
But there are important differences between the recent 2014 engagement and previous operations. The first is the wider regional context and Hamas's political situation. The organization's political isolation and financial crisis led it to "all or nothing" military confrontation hoping to change its dire situation by causing an international crisis and, thereby, maintaining its rule over Gaza. Strategically, Hamas's desperation dictated the beginning and end of

²⁵ Rapaport, "The Military Campaign."

²⁶ Richard Behar, "[The Media Intifada](#): Bad Math, Ugly Truths about *New York Times* in Israel-Hamas War," *Forbes*, Aug. 21, 2014.

hostilities in contrast to Israel's interests. This also had operational ramifications.²⁷

In all previous operations—Lebanon 2006, Gaza 2008-09 and November 2012—the IDF dictated the launching point as well as end date of operations, having carefully planned and initiated strikes based on accurate intelligence that surprised the enemy.²⁸ The element of surprise enabled the IDF to kill and destroy a significant number of personnel and equipment before the Palestinians either employed or concealed them, thus shortening their firepower endurance. This time, the initiative was on the Palestinian side. Hamas had prepared accordingly, and the initial strikes by the IDF were less productive. This situation further reinforced Hamas's readiness for a prolonged fight. Apparently Israel was expecting a replay of the West Bank's Operation Defensive Shield (2002): an exchange of standoff fire where Israeli casualties would be minimal; Palestinian casualties would be considerably higher, and sooner or later, the Palestinians would decide they had made their point and stop in order to tend to their wounds. As a palliative, Israel would offer some minor concessions such as an increased fishing zone.²⁹ In 2014, events turned out differently than expected.



It is assumed that Hezbollah is learning its own lessons from the 2014 Gaza operation. An extensive network of tunnels and bunkers was discovered in Lebanon's southern border district in 2006. Some were built only meters from the border and included sleeping quarters, bathrooms, kitchens, medical facilities, operations rooms, and ammunition storage facilities.

Another difference between this operation and previous ones was the central role of Hamas's offensive tunnel system from Gaza to Israel. Hamas proved itself a highly adaptive opponent against the Israeli technological edge. During the November 2012 war, Hamas realized that Jerusalem had developed an effective defensive response to rockets and missiles on Israeli population centers. Blocked on the ground and in the air, Hamas developed an underground doctrine. In doing so, it could rely on the knowledge previously developed in its system of smuggling tunnels between Egypt and Gaza to build an elaborate system of communication and offensive tunnels into Israel.³⁰

²⁷ Ron Tira, "Operation Protective Edge: Ends, Ways and Means and the Distinct Context," *Infinity Journal*, Sept. 2014, p. 3.

²⁸ Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir, "[Mowing the Grass](#)": Israel's Strategy for Protracted Intractable Conflict," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Dec. 2013, p. 85.

²⁹ United Press International, [Aug. 18, 2014](#).

³⁰ Eado Hecht, "Gaza: [How Hamas Tunnel Network Grew](#)," *BBC News Middle East*, July 22, 2014.

It is assumed that Hezbollah is watching and learning its own lessons from the 2014 operation in Gaza. The Lebanese Islamist group understands that Israel's anti-missile defense systems are effective. But the Jewish state does not yet have a decisive response for the tunnel threat. Despite the difficulties in constructing tunnels in the north of Israel, due to different geophysical conditions, Hezbollah with Iranian support was able to construct its own system of tunnels on the Lebanese-Israeli border,³¹ and it might well be encouraged by the enormous psychological impact the tunnels have had on Israeli public morale. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah has boasted lately that his forces will invade Israeli territory in the next confrontation, a threat likely based on his organization's system of offensive tunnels for such a daring operation.³² Consequently, in the next few years, the IDF will have to work hard to develop effective doctrine and technology, both offensive and defensive, to counter the tunnel threat.

The tunnel threat forced the IDF to mount a ground offensive, in contrast to the previous 2012 operation when only air strikes were conducted. Moreover, the tunnels proved that the enemy adapts and seeks new methods for neutralizing Western technological superiority. The necessity of a strong, high-quality ground force that deters

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the enemy from posing threats was proven once again.

On the face of it, Israel's main political goal of a ceasefire seems to have been achieved. While the exact reasons that prompted Hamas to accept and actually keep the long-term ceasefire are not known, there are indications that the Israeli strategy of attrition was working. The expected international pressure on Israel did not occur, and some of the Arab regimes—not only Egypt—seemed to support Israel over Hamas.

Although deterrence is an elusive concept and hard to assess, overall it seems that, under the watchful eyes of potential challengers in the region, Israel was able to maintain its deterrence posture. It did not hesitate to use force; its forces performed well on the tactical level, and it was able to deflect and intercept Hamas attacks. The Israeli public proved its maturity; it accepted the casualties and the daily difficulties, and Israeli society proved resilient and determined. If anything, the government fended off calls for a more extensive ground operation in Gaza. And although Israel's economy suffered noticeably, it was not significantly damaged.

But on the public diplomacy and media fronts, Israel lost again. Despite international criticism of Hamas's use of human shields, Israel's actions are also facing scathing criticism and a hostile U.N. inquiry over the number of Palestinian casualties and damage to Gaza's civilian infrastructure.³³ Another worrying aspect from Israel's perspective are the sharp

³¹ Calcalist (Tel Aviv), [Apr. 8, 2014](#).

³² Benedetta Berti and Yoram Schweitzer, "[Hizbollah and the Next War with Israel](#): Experience from Syria to Gaza," Strategic Assessment, Oct. 2014.

³³ Behar, "[The Media Intifada](#)."

disagreements with the U.S. administration on many issues.³⁴

On the other hand, Egypt was the principle actor whose measures in shutting the smuggling tunnels precipitated the war, and Cairo has undoubtedly been the war's main beneficiary. As the conflict progressed, the Egyptians continued to discover and destroy dozens of tunnels. Hamas was weakened while U.S. and European attempts to intervene diplomatically were rebuffed. In addition, Washington's attempts to involve Turkey and Qatar, Egypt's regional rivals, in the negotiations were likewise unsuccessful. It was Egypt's refusal to make any concessions to Hamas that gradually enabled Israel to force the regime to accept a ceasefire for no tangible return. Cairo holds the keys to the political situation, and it was for good reason that, while fighting Israel, most of Hamas's demands were actually directed at Egypt. Since the operation, Cairo has continued to demonstrate its resolve to keep Hamas in check.³⁵ As long as the current Egyptian regime stays in power, it will likely maintain a hostile policy toward the Islamist group, and Jerusalem can expect Cairo's cooperation in any future confrontation with Hamas. Paradoxically, however, growing Egyptian pressure on Hamas could box the group into a corner and expedite the next violent confrontation with Israel.

Israel's longer term goal is to gradually achieve a cumulative deterrence that will lead to the cessation of attacks.

Conclusion

The political results of Operation Protective Edge are not clear. Depending on the negotiations, it is possible that both sides will gain something. At this stage, Jerusalem achieved its most important objectives: dealing Hamas a devastating blow, destroying the offensive terror tunnels, maintaining the restrictions imposed on the Strip, and most importantly, preserving quiet on its borders.

Israel's strategy over the last two decades has been described as "mowing the grass," and the 2014 offensive is part of this pattern of low intensity fighting and occasional episodes of intense escalation.³⁶ Israel's operations are meant to degrade the enemy's capabilities sufficiently so as to deter it from renewing hostilities for as long as possible, with the longer term goal of gradually achieving a cumulative deterrence that will lead to cessation of attacks.³⁷

To succeed, a grass-mowing operation must inflict a certain level of pain on the enemy. However, as demonstrated by Operation Protective Edge, the level of damage the organization is willing to endure at any specific time depends on a wide variety of factors. What was unbearable for the Palestinians in the West Bank in 2002 was bearable in Gaza in 2014 because the political context had changed. Understanding the specific context is, therefore, crucial for strategic planners.

Israel's options in Gaza remain

³⁴ Jonathan Rynhold, "[The Kerry-Qatar Ceasefire Document](#): What It Says about American Strategy in the Middle East," *Perspectives Papers*, no. 261, BESA Center, Aug. 3, 2014.

³⁵ *Al-Monitor* (Washington, D.C.), [Sept. 8, 2014](#).

³⁶ Inbar and Shamir, "[Mowing the Grass.](#)"

³⁷ Doron Almog, "Cumulative Deterrence and the War on Terrorism," *Parameters*, Winter 2004-05; Thomas Rid, "Deterrence beyond the State: The Israeli Experience," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Apr. 2012.

somewhere between bad and worse. The alternatives to Hamas rule in Gaza are anarchy or a no less extreme Islamist group or coalition, both undesirable outcomes. Aware of Israel's reluctance to seize control of the Strip or to topple its rule, Hamas feels it can act with impunity. A sad but obvious conclusion is that despite the intensity of the fighting and the international attention it attracted, few fundamentals of the conflict have changed. There is, unfortunately, little

doubt that Israel needs to start preparing for the next Gaza campaign.

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