

VARIATION ON A THEME

ISRAEL'S OPERATION *Cast Lead* AND THE GAZA STRIP MISSILE CONUNDRUM

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Israel's assault on Gaza in early 2009, Operation *Cast Lead*, achieved significant tactical successes and managed to redeem the Israel Defence Forces' poor performance during the 2006 Lebanon War. Sergio Catignani examines Israel's military and public information campaign and why *Cast Lead* failed to accomplish the government's two main goals of stopping rocket attacks on Israel and the influx of weapons for resupplying Hamas.

The Israeli-Hamas conflict has endured since Hamas's establishment in 1988 during the height of the first Intifada. As a radical Islamist organisation bent on liberating all of Israel/Palestine from any Israeli presence, Hamas adopted suicide terrorism as its weapon of choice for reversing the positive outcome of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel; and subsequently for bleeding Israel and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) during the 2000-05 Al-Aqsa Intifada. Its Gaza-based terrorist and guerrilla campaign eventually led Israel to unilaterally disengage from the Gaza Strip in August 2005. By then Israel had, in effect, been able to debilitate Palestinian suicide terrorist capabilities originating both from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Despite Israel's success at stifling suicide terrorism, by 2004 Hamas was able to adapt its tactics to what amounted to an 'over/under' campaign in which it would use tunnels to smuggle weapons and carry out underground attacks on IDF bases and patrols, as well as conduct an unrelenting rocket and mortar barrage against Israeli villages and towns in close proximity to the Gaza Strip – most notably, Sderot, Netivot and eventually Ashkelon. Since Israel's unilateral disengagement, Palestinian factions had fired over 6,000

rockets and mortars against towns and communities in southern Israel. Israel accordingly carried out various operations before and after its unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip in order to dismantle Hamas's increasingly lethal rocket and mortar capacities and to re-establish security for its southern communities.¹

Whilst the damage and casualties inflicted on Israeli civilian communities by Hamas's rocket and mortar attacks were relatively limited, the psychological effect of such tactics was significant and able to disrupt very often the daily lives of such communities. For example, according to the Society for Recording Terror-Induced Trauma Cases, by late 2008 '55 per cent of Sderot's citizens had witnessed Qassam missile blasts; 28.4 per cent were made dysfunctional by post-traumatic effects; while 33.6 per cent of the town's schoolchildren aged 13-18 suffered from severe learning disabilities'.² The Israeli government, in effect, felt compelled to conduct Operation *Cast Lead* so that it could attempt to re-establish its deterrent posture vis-à-vis the region's terrorist organisations. This deterrent posture had, in fact, been significantly eroded after Hamas's abduction of IDF Corporal Gilad Shalit in June 2006 and by the IDF's poor performance during the 2006 summer Lebanon War.³

The End of (Another) Ceasefire

On 19 December 2008 the post-Operation *Hot Winter* ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Gaza-based terrorist organisations and Israel, which was negotiated by Egypt in June of that year, expired. Hamas had issued a statement on 18 December that it would resume attacks on Israel and had already fired around 200 rockets and mortars into Israel in November following an Israeli raid that had killed six Hamas operatives in the Gaza Strip on 4 November. True to its word, on 21 December Hamas launched seventy rockets whilst issuing a statement that it would renew the ceasefire if Israel were to stop its 'aggression' on Gaza and open up its border crossings.⁴

Within the space of a week, the Israeli leadership triumvirate comprising Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defence Minister Ehud Barak decided to unleash the IDF once again onto Gaza in order to re-establish the ever-elusive 'quiet' and deterrence that many Israelis yearned for. The Israeli Government was intent on employing the IDF on a much greater scale than it had done in previous Gaza-based operations. Some even labelled the operation the 'Gaza War' and a 'war of no choice', a term normally used by Israeli policy-makers for wars involving major conventional threats. They hoped that this 'war' would provide Olmert – who would soon step



Tanks roll towards Gaza, December 2008. Photo courtesy of IDF.

down as prime minister following the Israeli General Election in February – as well as the IDF the opportunity to redeem their dismal performance during the 2006 Lebanon War.

Israel and especially the IDF were intent on delivering a lethal blow to Hamas

In order to achieve this, Olmert and other government leaders made sure that grandiose statements on what could be achieved by the IDF campaign would be avoided at all costs. Various government leaders warned the Israeli population that the IDF's mission to extirpate Gaza-based terrorism would be an arduous task and that the population would have to endure certain reprisals from Hamas. Olmert stated at the start of Operation *Cast Lead* that 'This will be a long and difficult war which will be very painful. The expectation that we will be able to hit hundreds of terrorists a day cannot be realized ... The patience, determination and stamina of the people in the home

front will eventually determine our ability to complete the mission'.⁵

Olmert's exhortations alone could not prepare the Israeli population to withstand Hamas's retaliation. Israel had learnt from the Lebanon War that in order to avoid terror-induced hysteria and the mass-fleeing of whole communities from targeted areas, it would have to provide sufficient passive defensive measures through a reinforced and extended bomb shelter and early warning system. Such measures were all the more crucial given that Hamas was focused on terrorising the population in order to force the cessation of the IDF's campaign. Scores of Israelis had received text messages from Hamas alerting them that they would bear the brunt of its reprisal rocket campaign as long as Operation *Cast Lead* continued. The text read, 'Rockets on all cities, shelters not protect, Qassam rocket, Hamas'.⁶ This time around the Home Front Command, responsible for protecting Israel's rearguard, was able to provide vital protection and assistance to the local population.⁷ It was able to mitigate the military and psychological effects of Hamas's rocket and mortar retaliatory attacks.

Furthermore, the Israeli security cabinet made sure that limited and clear goals would be given to the IDF, so that military leaders could operationalise such goals without having to second-guess their civilian masters, as had occurred occasionally in the past. Moreover, such goals were provided to the IDF before rather than during the campaign as had occurred in Lebanon in 2006. In this case, the Israeli leadership, after some debate, decided that the operation's overarching goal would be that of achieving a considerably more advantageous long-term ceasefire based on deterrence.

The Israeli government's ability to curb any excessive enthusiasm and bold declarations for the operation, as well as the IDF's excellent tactical and operational performance during *Cast Lead*, played a significant part in capturing and maintaining Israeli public support during the whole campaign. For example, a survey on Israeli Jewish public opinion conducted between 4 and 6 January (a week into Operation *Cast Lead*) by the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University, found that 94 per cent of the public polled supported the operation itself and 93 per cent gave

positive appraisals of the IDF's fighting performance.⁸ The Israeli population's frustration with Hamas's rocket campaign over the years had made the public more hawkish in relation to Gaza-based terrorism. Consequently, both the civilian and leadership echelons were able to capitalise on such sentiments during the campaign.

'After this operation there will not be one Hamas building left standing in Gaza'

With such public support, political and military leaders could not resist the temptation of trying to achieve more with *Cast Lead*: either the destruction of Hamas's military capabilities or the complete elimination of Hamas as a viable entity in Palestinian politics. Two days into the operation, Deputy IDF Chief of Staff Major General Dan Harel declared, 'This operation is different from previous ones ... We are hitting not only terrorists and launchers, but also the whole Hamas government and all its wings ... After this operation there will not be one Hamas building left standing in Gaza, and we plan to change the rules of the game'.⁹ Even the IDF spokesperson, Brigadier General Avi Benayahu, reiterated these far-reaching aims by explaining that the IDF's 'intention is not to arrive at a ceasefire; it is to destroy Hamas's motivation and intention to fight'.¹⁰ Israel and especially the IDF were intent on delivering a lethal blow to Hamas if given the opportunity. Operation *Cast Lead* seemed to present the occasion for realising such ambitions.

Operation *Cast Lead* Commences

Operation *Cast Lead* began at 11:30 am on 27 December 2008 with Israeli Air Force (IAF) bombardments on Hamas government offices, weapons depots and factories and other critical infrastructure in central and northern Gaza. Around 100 warplanes and strike helicopters dropped over 100 bombs within the first hour of the operation, catching Hamas entirely by surprise. On the second day the IAF began targeting the underground

weapons smuggling tunnel network along the Philadelphi Corridor (an 8.5 kilometre-long buffer zone along the Egypt–Gaza border) so as to hinder Hamas from replenishing its stockpile of weapons. In order to destroy smuggling tunnels within the Philadelphi Corridor, the IAF employed 5,000-pound laser-guided 'bunker-buster' GBU-28 bombs with a 4,400-pound penetrating warhead. The IAF's surprise attack was centred on a large 'target bank', which had been collated over a number of months before the operation through a mixture of air, human and signal intelligence-gathering resources.

As the campaign progressed into its first few days, IDF leaders discussed at least two potential scenarios for a ground invasion. The first option would entail a rapid in-and-out raid with tanks, armoured infantry and close air support in order to target Hamas members before redeploying back into Israel. This scenario would, they hoped, bring about a more favourable ceasefire agreement. The second scenario involved a much more extensive operation aimed at destroying *completely* Hamas's military capabilities and possibly Hamas itself. Ultimately the IDF operated on the basis of the first option, given the growing international pressure and condemnation as the campaign progressed, due to a steady rise in Palestinian collateral damage and civilian casualties. Moreover, whilst Olmert would have liked to have extended the campaign to obtain greater gains from *Cast Lead*, both Barak and Livni were fearful that an extended campaign and possibly a greater number of IDF casualties could land a blow to their electoral fortunes in the Israeli parliamentary elections scheduled for 10 February.

In sum, the IDF's three principal lines of operation set out by the IDF high command for Operation *Cast Lead* were:

- To erode the military capabilities of Hamas and other Gaza-based Palestinian insurgent/terrorist groups. This would be carried out initially by a devastating air campaign, followed a week later by a limited ground forces incursion

- To conduct targeted killings of Hamas leaders (particularly those belonging to its military wing, the Izz Al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades), such as: Nizar Rayan (killed 1 January); commander of Hamas's rocket launching programme in Gaza City, Amir Mansi (killed 10 January); Minister of Interior Affairs Sayyed Siam, and head of Hamas's interior security services Salah Sharah (both killed 15 January). These regime-targeting strikes would, they believed, deter further incitement by Hamas against Israel, but in the main were designed to reduce the effectiveness of the organisation by robbing it of its more experienced and charismatic leaders
- To carry out attacks on Hamas logistics and infrastructure in order to debilitate both its civilian and military assets, which had allowed Hamas to conduct its rocket campaign against Israel since the Al-Aqsa Intifada. This line of operation involved striking at the vast tunnel network linking the Gaza Strip to Egypt, as well as at the arms storage and rocket production facilities scattered all over the Gaza strip, in both official Hamas government and security service buildings as well as in civilian buildings used by Hamas for military purposes.¹¹

The Ground Invasion

On 3 January, day eight of *Cast Lead*, the IDF finally initiated its tank and armoured infantry invasion of the Gaza Strip. Following a week of air, artillery and naval bombing, the IDF carried out a ground incursion simultaneously from several directions into Gaza with three infantry brigade task forces (Paratroopers, Golani and Givati Brigades) and one armoured task force (401st Armoured Brigade) each supported by Engineering, Artillery and Intelligence Corps units. Ground units advanced under the cover of heavy ground and naval artillery fire and with close air support. Amphibious landings of IDF troops were also carried out in the south Philadelphi enclave in order



The IDF operationalised 'diffused warfare' in order to tackle the urban insurgency, Gaza, January 2009. Photo courtesy of IDF.

to target remaining tunnels and Hamas units.

The four brigade task forces cut Gaza into three areas of operations in order to impede the smuggling and replenishment of Hamas units as well as to stop Hamas operatives from moving in between sectors controlled by the different brigades. Each brigade was also specifically assigned an operational objective relative to their area of operations:

- Along the Philadelphi Corridor, rocket and weapons-smuggling routes were targeted
- In the south, training compounds and weapons storage facilities were targeted
- In Gaza City, Hamas command-and-control bases were attacked
- In the northern Gaza Strip, Hamas units and rocket/

mortar launching areas were targeted.¹²

By the second day of the ground incursion, Israeli forces had already taken over launching sites in Beit Hanoun in the north and had captured sections of the Zeitun refugee camp and Netzarim, which permitted them to cut off Gaza City, the operational 'headquarters' of Hamas's leadership.

IDF ground forces avoided cramped alleyways and confined zones of fire

In order to improve joint operations between air and ground units, the IDF adopted a different operational command structure compared to previous operations. Unmanned aerial vehicles

(UAVs), helicopters and fighter jets were assigned to ground forces without IAF operational headquarters having to approve sortie targets. According to a senior IDF commander, this was the 'first time aircraft were controlled by the brigade commanders in their area of operation'.¹³ This was possible by allocating air support co-ordination officers to brigade headquarters and to each battalion or smaller-size fighting units operating in Gaza. UAV units were particularly decisive in enabling ground force units to operate effectively within crowded Gaza urban centres. UAVs would fly 500 metres ahead of advancing units and provide real-time imagery and advice regarding imminent 'over the urban horizon' threats.

Each brigade, which came under the overall operational command of Southern Command rather than under that of General Staff Headquarters, operated with a great level of autonomy

in order to adapt as rapidly as possible to the evolving tactical situation on the ground, thus enabling better exploitation of targeting opportunities, which often required very rapid decision-making cycles. All four brigade commanders fought alongside their units rather than commanding them from a rearguard operational headquarters as had occurred during the 2006 Lebanon War. Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee member Rafi Eitan noted how the so-called 'LCD culture' command-style had led to various operational blunders during the Lebanon War, and how such a leadership style had been changed since then under the stewardship of IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi: 'We all remember the brigade commanders in the Second Lebanon War, sitting at their computers while their men were in the field. Now they are the first in the field'.¹⁴ The IDF would not repeat such command and control errors in *Cast Lead*.

Diffused Warfare

During Operation *Cast Lead* the IDF implemented 'diffused warfare' as an operational concept in order to deal with urban terrorist and insurgent threats. This concept is based on the premise that rather than employing only a small part of fighting units during conventional combat, fighting insurgents in the urban battlefield requires the military to employ forces independently and contemporaneously over a large area of operations. In order to achieve this effectively, the diffused warfare concept incorporates multidimensional intelligence gathered by electronic sensors and humans. 'Processed via a network-centric infrastructure, Intel is rapidly transformed into targeting information and distributed to the most appropriate' ground or air asset in order to eliminate the target within a much more rapid sensor-to-shooter cycle.¹⁵ The operational tempo of the IDF proved too overwhelming for Hamas, which in the end decided to avoid direct frontal assaults or engagements with the vastly superior conventional forces of the Israeli military. In a sense, the IDF's improved operational capabilities and overall military superiority forced

most Hamas leaders and fighting units underground (literally), only for them to re-emerge after a new ceasefire had been established in mid-January.

The IDF's overall military superiority forced most Hamas leaders and fighting units underground

Air surveillance from Heron and Hermes 450 UAVs and Apache attack helicopters granted an unparalleled degree of real-time close air support to units operating within the urban battlefield (helicopters operated within thirty metres of friendly forces). Each brigade was supported by an attack helicopter squadron. Intelligence sources state that 'F-15 and F-16 aircraft could identify and fire air-to-ground missiles within 30 seconds of data transmission to take out fleeing targets'.¹⁶ These improved sensor-to-shooter cycle capabilities were especially crucial for targeting Hamas rocket and mortar launch units, which would often 'shoot and scoot' within the densely populated and built-up conurbations of Gaza. In order to pre-empt or deter further attacks, the IAF employed many "'hover and kill" missions, where attack helicopters [would] circle above the combat area at high altitude before dropping to low level to engage their targets'.¹⁷

In order to co-ordinate all air assets as well as air-to-ground operations, the IAF employed two 'Conformal Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft – Gulfstream G550s each modified with three large active electronically scanned array radar'.¹⁸ These aircraft were consistently used for 'early warning, air situation picture generation and air combat command and control', which were crucial in reconciling data from the scores of UAVs, fighter jets, strike helicopters, MEDIVAC units, artillery and missile fire from various ground and naval platforms, all of which were operating within a very confined and dense air-land battle-space.¹⁹ The IDF's ability to co-ordinate its forces and avoid self-inflicted casualties did suffer a

blow, though, on 9 January when three Golani Brigade soldiers were killed and over twenty injured by a tank shell fired mistakenly at a building in Tel Al-Shakef in the Tofah district of Gaza City where IDF troops had taken shelter. Other than this friendly-fire incident (in which the Golani Brigade Commander, Colonel Avi Peled, was lightly wounded), the IDF was able to co-ordinate its ground, air and naval operations fairly seamlessly. This was a significant improvement over its operations in southern Lebanon in 2006.

IDF officials expected to encounter 'nature reserves' containing Hamas units and weapons, similar to those that IDF units came across in Lebanon whilst fighting Hizbullah. In Gaza's case, the IDF would be operating in an 'urban jungle' and such reserves would not only be used to ambush and booby-trap IDF units, but also would be employed to abduct IDF soldiers. Lieutenant Colonel Yehuda Cohen, commander of the Givati Brigade's Rotem Battalion, gave an example of how Hamas operatives booby-trapped civilian homes intended to inflict significant casualties on the IDF as it operated in Gaza's urban centres:²⁰

We saw house bombs here [areas around Gaza City], houses booby-trapped from the inside or houses where the gas pipe was left open and all openings were sealed so that they blow up on us as we enter. Those who booby-trap houses should not be surprised when we detonate them from afar in order to protect our soldiers' lives.

In order to avoid suffering major casualties when entering urban areas of operation, IDF ground forces avoided cramped alleyways and confined zones of fire; they also tended to manoeuvre at a high operational tempo without taking protracted breaks. Booby-trap mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) along incursion routes were cleared by employing 'rocket-launched chains of small charges' and other means at the disposal of the Engineering Corps and its elite reconnaissance unit, Sayeret Yahalom.²¹ The IDF also moved through unexpected routes and often used D-9 bulldozers in order to circumvent booby-trapped alleyways by ploughing through

actual buildings, thus enabling troops to move under the cover of such buildings, albeit at the cost of collateral damage.

Operating in a Civilian Battlespace

The IDF insisted that it tried to limit collateral damage and civilian casualties during *Cast Lead*, but there were instances in which it deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure, claiming they were being used by Hamas for military purposes – and as such, therefore, were legitimate military targets under international law. By the first week of the Gaza offensive, for example, Israel had bombed nine Gaza mosques which were being used by Hamas as rocket and weapons storehouses.²² During the campaign IDF Combat Camera teams were deployed with units in order to provide footage for intelligence purposes but also for the media. Their aim was to demonstrate that Hamas had booby-trapped civilian buildings, such as schools, had used civilians as human shields and stored weapons caches in mosques and other civilian infrastructure.²³

Furthermore, ground and aerial intelligence units were able to observe and record secondary explosions after hitting ‘civilian’ targets. The IDF claimed that this was clear evidence of the existence of large quantities of ordinance and explosive materials hidden by Hamas, which confirmed Hamas’s disregard for Palestinian civilian casualties and collateral damage.

On balance, Israel’s public diplomacy and information operations campaign during *Cast Lead* was far superior to the one it had carried out during the 2006 Lebanon War. Nevertheless, Israel was roundly condemned by some countries. Following the attacks on the Gaza mosques, the chairman of the Egyptian Parliament’s Foreign Relations Committee, Dr Mustafa El-Fiqi, stated that ‘Israel is an aggressive country which poses a danger to all the nations in the region’.²⁴

IDF spokespeople and members of the Israeli government repeatedly stressed the serious efforts that the IDF was making in order to avoid civilian casualties and collateral damage despite Hamas’s reported use of civilian quarters

and human shields during the campaign. Foreign Minister Livni, for example, stated during a foreign press conference that ‘We need to understand that they produce missiles in homes occupied by civilians who are well aware of this. Before each attack, we announced it via their media and asked civilians to leave. We dropped leaflets from the air, and made more than 19,000 phone calls to residents in the area’.²⁵ These leaflets read, ‘Area resident, as a result of the acts undertaken by terror activists in your area against Israel, the IDF is forced to respond immediately and operate in this area. For your own safety you are asked to leave the area immediately’.²⁶ They contrasted such warnings with Hamas’s statements, which declared that civilians would be deliberately targeted in retaliation for the IDF’s ongoing Gaza campaign.

Israel’s image abroad was adversely affected, although it is difficult to assess how severely

Accusations against Israel that it was causing a humanitarian disaster due to Operation *Cast Lead* were rife during the campaign. Israel’s public diplomacy was, however, largely successful in rebutting such allegations. Dismissing charges that Israel had not allowed humanitarian aid to reach Gaza during the conflict, Israeli President Shimon Peres stated that ‘42,327 trucks transporting essential supplies had been allowed into Gaza’.²⁷ Moreover, the IDF reported that ‘more than one million liters of fuel were transferred into the Gaza Strip through the Nahal Oz fuel crossing’ in order to enable the continued operation of power stations, hospitals and other critical infrastructure.²⁸ Following the commencement of the ground invasion (and given the international outcry regarding the dire conditions of Palestinian civilians), the IDF also implemented a daily humanitarian ceasefire usually between 10:00 and 13:00 in order to allow humanitarian convoy deliveries to enter Gaza through the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings. However, according to an operations officer in the Gaza Co-

ordination Communication Headquarters, Lieutenant Colonel Avi Biton, Hamas would often seize such convoys in order to sell the items to the population.²⁹

The firepower employed by the IDF and the deployment of its armed forces in such a densely populated area resulted in a significant number of civilian deaths. According to a senior IDF military official during *Cast Lead*, Palestinians suffered 1,166 deaths; 709 of these were Hamas and Islamic Jihad operatives whose names are known by the IDF; 162 of the fatalities were men between the ages of 16 and 45, whose connection to either organisation is unclear; 295 of the deaths were Palestinian civilians.³⁰ Consequently, and despite an improved public diplomacy campaign, Israel’s image abroad was adversely affected, although it is difficult to assess how severely.

Despite three weeks of heavy bombardments and two weeks of Israeli ground operations, Israel proved unable to reach a favourable ceasefire agreement with Hamas and could not eliminate Hamas’s rocket and mortar launching capabilities. (Hamas fighters were still able to launch over 600 rockets into Israel during the twenty-two day conflict.) In the face of mounting international pressure,³¹ Israel unilaterally declared a ceasefire on 17 January 2009.

Operation *Cast Lead*: An Israeli Success?

Israel achieved significant tactical successes and managed to redeem its poor performance during the 2006 Lebanon War. The head of Southern Command, Major General Yoav Galant, stated that ‘there was nearly not one weapon storage facility, smuggling tunnel and terror operative house that was not hit in the Gaza Strip, and there were minimal tactical encounters by our forces with them ... that ended without an achievement on our part’.³² Yet very little was obtained from a strategic and political point of view.

In a sense, Israel’s inability to dent Hamas’s military capabilities was due to the fact that rather than seeking to fully capture two critical areas – the Philadelphi Corridor and Rafah in the south and the rocket- and mortar-launching sites in Gaza City in the north – the IDF General Staff

stretched its troops out too thinly and over-relied on heavy air bombardment in order to target such an area of operations. During the initial few days of the ground campaign the IDF seemed set on entering such areas. Yet instead of going in to mop-up Hamas units, weapons caches and factories, units were halted at the outskirts of these target areas. The IDF for the most part left its forces on the outskirts of the more densely populated areas. These areas often consisted of open, flat agricultural land, and in such terrain the IDF clearly faced less of a topographical challenge than when it had fought Hizbullah in the hills and wadis of southern Lebanon in 2006. An enduring feature of contemporary militaries is casualty aversion but the IDF, despite its increased preparedness for *Cast Lead* and its superiority vis-à-vis Hamas forces, nonetheless did not run the risk of putting its forces in more danger than it thought necessary. Whilst such considerations helped avoid a casualty count that could have backfired in the election campaign, it limited the extent to which ground forces could dismantle Hamas's military infrastructure.

Securing Israel's southern communities has been a strategic goal that has eluded Israel

Professor Ruth Gabizon, a member of the Winograd Committee, which investigated the failures of the 2006 Lebanon War, argued two weeks after the end of Operation *Cast Lead* that 'both wars ended with an insufficient ceasefire [and that] the conflict in Gaza is not over'.³³ Such a statement could have easily been applied to the myriad other major Gaza operations carried out by the IDF since 2004. Israel again was not able to re-establish a satisfactory deterrent posture

with regards to Hamas and other anti-Israeli organisations in the Gaza Strip. Following Israel's unilateral ceasefire declaration, which included warnings that it would continue to retaliate against any terrorist activity, Hamas defiantly declared that its 'resistance' would carry on. International pledges for the reconstruction of what some have estimated as \$2 billion dollars worth of damage caused by the IDF will, in effect, enable Hamas to re-establish again its government infrastructure and services, thus frustrating *Cast Lead's* attempt at incapacitating Hamas's governance in Gaza.

Even Israeli diplomatic attempts at trying to cajole Egypt into being more proactive at stemming the smuggling of weapons via the Philadelphi corridor into Gaza have not borne fruit. Accordingly, on 16 January Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice signed a memorandum of understanding in which the US committed to provide Israel with the resources and technology needed in order to 'prevent the supply of arms and related materiel to terrorist organizations that threaten either party, with a particular focus on the supply of arms, related materiel and explosives into Gaza to Hamas and other terrorist organizations'.³⁴

Notwithstanding the US-Israeli memorandum of understanding, it seems highly likely that Hamas will continue to rearm itself, recruit and train new members, and persist in relying on escalating Iranian financial and military help in order to provoke Israel into another invasion, which it hopes will prove more costly to the IDF than Operation *Cast Lead* has been. Such provocations have come sooner rather than later.

On 1 February, after fourteen rocket and mortar rounds were fired into southern Israel, the IAF carried out air strikes against a Hamas government

building and six smuggling tunnels in southern Gaza. This only reinforced what most ministers had been saying since Israel's unilateral ceasefire declaration: Operation *Cast Lead* did not accomplish the two main goals of stopping rocket attacks on Israel and the influx of weapons for resupplying Hamas, and thus should be continued until both goals are achieved.

It is probable that Israel will be enmeshed again in Gaza

In spite of the IDF's much-improved tactical and operational performance, securing Israel's southern communities has been a strategic goal that has eluded Israel even in this most recent round of major hostilities. As Stuart Cohen, an expert on the IDF, has argued, 'the end of the operation left a somewhat bitter taste, principally because it seemed so indecisive. There was no dramatic finale'.³⁵ With the newly-established Benjamin Netanyahu government in power, it is probable that Israel will be enmeshed again in Gaza with another of its episodic major operations in order to try once again to improve the security of its southern communities. The question that Israeli policy-makers might be asking themselves now is whether or not the next IDF operation in Gaza will achieve anything greater than another unstable ceasefire. ■

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NOTES

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