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THE "GAZA WAR"

A Strategic Analysis

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**SYNOPSIS:**

One can argue whether the fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza is a "war," or should be seen as just one more tragic surge in violence in the decades-long struggle between Israel and the Palestinians. It is, however, the first major armed struggle between Israel and Hamas, as distinguished from conflicts between Israel and the PLO and Fatah. It also is a case study in how Israeli capabilities have changed since the fighting with Hezbollah in 2006, and in the nature of asymmetric war between states and non-state actors.

Anthony H. Cordesman, the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at CSIS, has prepared a detailed analysis of the military, strategic, and grand strategic dimensions of the war and its immediate aftermath. The report is entitled *The "Gaza War": A Strategic Analysis*, and is available on the CSIS web site at:

[http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/090202\\_gaza\\_war.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/090202_gaza_war.pdf)

The report draws heavily on briefings given in Israeli during and immediately after the fighting which were made possible by a visit sponsored by Project Interchange, day-to-day reporting issued by the Israeli Defense Spokesman, and interviews with Arab officials and experts before and after the conflict. It examines the war in terms of the fighting, what it says about the changes in Israeli tactics and capabilities and the broader lessons it may provide for asymmetric warfare, and the strategic and grand strategic outcome of the fighting.

The report analyzes Arab views and reactions, but it should be stressed that Hamas has not provided more than minimal details on its view of the fighting, other than ideological and propaganda statements. Any military report has to be written largely from an Israeli perspective, although the impact of the fighting and its strategic outcome can be evaluated from a much broader perspective.

The analysis reveals impressive improvements in the readiness and capability of the Israeli Defense Forces since the fighting against the Hezbollah in 2006. It also indicates that Israel did not violate the laws of war. It did deliberately use decisive force to

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enhance regional deterrence and demonstrate that it had restored its military edge. These, however, are legitimate military objectives in spite of their very real humanitarian costs.

What is far less clear is that Israel's tactical successes achieved significant strategic and grand strategic benefits. In practice, any such benefits may actually have been more than offset by the mid and long-term strategic costs of the operation in terms of Arab and other regional reactions. Such conclusions are necessarily uncertain, but Israel does not seem to have been properly prepared for the political dimensions of war, or to have had any clear plan and cohesive leadership in achieving conflict termination. Moreover, it may have approach Hamas and the Arab world with attitudes that will increase instability in the region and ultimately weaken Israel's security.

This analysis is being circulated in final review form. Suggested additions, corrections, and revisions will be greatly appreciated.

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