

Cast Lead: The Impact And Achievements

by Gerald Steinberg

Israel's Gaza operation - in reality, a mini-war - was in many ways the opposite of the 2006 Lebanon War.

In Gaza, the stated goals were deliberately limited, in contrast to the boasts made by Prime Minister Olmert in 2006, while the outcome was far more favourable. One-third of the country withstood missile attacks for three weeks, reflecting the effectiveness of the preparations this time. Israelis demonstrated the capabilities and determination necessary to defend themselves against attack, and restored the balance of power.

The deterrence against Iran and its proxies that was only partially achieved against Hezbollah was far more visible in Gaza. The mistakes of the Lebanon war were gone, and the political leadership - for the most part - acted wisely. At each stage, Israel took Hamas by surprise, overcoming the array of explosives and weapons placed in, around, and under the houses, hospitals, mosques, and schools. Key terrorist leaders were killed, and when the optimum results had been achieved, Israel declared a unilateral ceasefire, pulling out the ground forces before they could be targeted.

The diplomatic initiatives - led by French President Sarkozy, with his British, German, Italian, Spanish and Czech counterparts - provided a theatrical diversion with little substance. This intense motion propped up Mubarak's crumbling regime, and created a facade of international cooperation in preventing Iran from rearming Hamas. In Lebanon, UNFIL (also led by the French) failed to stop new arms from reaching Hezbollah, and only the IDF, in cooperation with advanced American technology, can prevent the rebuilding of the tunnels, and another round of attacks and response.

In parallel, the continuing demonisation of Israel and anti-Semitism that accompanied the war reinforced Israeli distrust of Europe. Self-important campaigners from Oxfam, Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, and dozens of groups funded by British and other European governments falsely blamed Israel for a "humanitarian crisis", while ignoring the import and manufacture of thousands of rockets under Hamas. And UN officials charged with providing aid and running schools joined the political war that denied evidence of Hamas attacks from their facilities.

But for most Palestinians, these propaganda victories do not offset the Israeli

successes on the ground. These may also strengthen the small group of Palestinian pragmatists, and open the way for economic cooperation with Israel, as occurred after the 1967 war. But history shows that this will not lead to a quick change on core political issues.

For over 60 years, Palestinian society has viewed Israel as an illegitimate creation and rejected Jewish sovereignty, regardless of borders. Instant peace plans and grand conferences will not reverse this - the process will take at least a generation. In the meanwhile, stability depends on Israel's ability to maintain its deterrent capability.

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