

The Combat Performance of Hamas in the Gaza War of 2014

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Sep 29, 2014

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The latest fighting exposed the group's military improvements and weaknesses alike, and Hamas members will study the lessons learned in preparation for future confrontations with Israel.

In its war with Israel in the summer of 2014, Hamas displayed a wide range of combat capabilities, including new offensive and defensive tactics. The group's evolution on the battlefield presented serious challenges to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and, when combined with Israeli operations, made the conflict the most costly in terms of casualties and damage to Gaza since Hamas seized power in 2007.

Hamas once again demonstrated that it is a learning organization. It studies its experience in battle, develops lessons, and incorporates them into its combat doctrine, forces, and operations. It plays down the effects of Israeli actions publicly, does not admit losses or mistakes, and presents a face of victory. Inside the organization, however, Hamas engages in a serious learning process. Major improvements in its latest war included: enhanced range and numbers of rockets, improved protection of its military infrastructure from Israeli attack, a system of offensive and defensive tunnels, and increased effectiveness and cohesion of its ground combat forces. Taken together, these improvements allowed Hamas to conduct sustained strikes deep inside Israel, even while under siege from Israeli military operations, to conduct offensive ground actions inside Israel and to present significant opposition to Israel's ground incursion. This was a clear improvement in performance since the Hamas-Israel war in 2009. Nevertheless, Hamas also showed weaknesses within its military forces.

This article reviews the group's preparations for battle, its offensive and defensive operations, its lessons learned, and the likely contours of the next conflict. It finds that Hamas conducted significant offensive and defensive operations, absorbed intense attacks from the IDF, and emerged with reduced but still intact military capabilities. Hamas will study the lessons learned from this conflict to better prepare for its next military confrontation with Israel...

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