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Operation Protective Edge:

Lessons from the Civilian Front – Interim Summary

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Israel's current round of fighting has been notably successful on the civilian front, particularly in comparison with previous rounds, including the Second Lebanon War (2006), Operation Cast Lead (2008-9), and Operation Pillar of Defense (2012). The damage caused by the approximately 2,500 rockets launched from Gaza in the 24 days of fighting to date has been relatively small in terms of casualties (three civilian deaths), reasonable in terms of economic damage, and limited in terms of impact on the daily routine, with the most severe damage occurring in the south. Since the start of the ground deployment, there has been a noticeable shift in the balance between the military and civilian fronts, with greater emphasis on the former; there has also been an overall decrease in the rocket attacks against Israel, both in terms of numbers and range.

The success of the civilian front in confronting the rocket threat may be attributed to several important factors:

1. The relatively limited scope of rocket launches at Israeli targets: The daily average is about 100, lower than during the Second Lebanon War, and much lower than the daily average during Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012. Since the ground incursion into Gaza started, there has been a drop in the number of launches and a noticeable reduction in their range. In general, the range of some of the rockets was greater this time than in the past, with large urban areas, including greater Tel Aviv, attacked much more than in the past. Nonetheless, the daily average in the center of the country was relatively lower and the rate of interception much greater than in the south, which absorbed most of the attacks.
2. The distinct success – both operationally and psychologically – of the Iron Dome system: During this round of fighting the number of batteries was increased and their technological components were upgraded. The daily interception average was about 23 (compared to a daily launch average of about 100).
3. The public conducted itself well during the emergency routine. Instructions on how to react to rocket launches were followed, and most Israelis managed to maintain the normal pattern of life between attacks, while taking great care to be

mindful of the threat and take appropriate protective action. Credit for this success should go to the IDF Home Front Command.

Despite the justified satisfaction from the success on the civilian front, which has strategic importance in the fight against Hamas and in the eyes of other adversaries in the region, Israel is facing a threat of limited scale, certainly when compared to familiar reference scenarios, or the capacities of Hizbollah in the north. Therefore, the right lessons must be learned and applied in order to ensure proper preparedness for possible future threats. These include:

1. *Active defense*: The success of the combined defense system is highly significant. Nonetheless, more extreme future scenarios should be anticipated, especially with regard to precision, range, and the potency of warheads of high trajectory weapons. Improvements in these components will turn the relatively limited rockets into missiles that will allow attacks with much higher chances of hitting their targets – whether of a civilian, military, or infrastructure nature. The more serious threat will require tighter and more effective preparation. As big as the Israeli achievement is, it is important to remember that every active defense system has its limitations. It will never be hermetic. In order to have an adequate response to future scenarios, it is necessary to increase the number of active defense batteries and the quality of the system, and the sooner the better.
2. *Passive defense*: From the Israeli perspective, the results of the continuous rocket offensive are reasonable and serve as a firm basis for the conduct the military campaign. This indicates that the existing concept and level of sheltering is basically sound, even if it requires some improvements, particularly in areas where there are insufficient shelters, such as in the Negev. In principle, a sober view of the expanded threat would require a national plan that takes into consideration the high costs of passive defense and prioritizes investments on the basis of specific needs. Special emphasis must be placed on protecting critical national infrastructures, such as the electrical grid and transportation nodes.
3. *Performance of the military (Home Front Command in particular) and civilian (local government in particular) systems*: Management of the targeted arenas was good, given the limited scope of the threat and the relatively low density of damage. Seemingly, then, the existing defense doctrine to the rocket threat is correct, although it is important to enhance the responsibility of local governments as the key element in managing the response in the field. At the national level, there seemed to be no impact to the abolishment of the Home Front Ministry, but reconstructing the responsibilities and authorities among the various government ministries themselves and with local government is essential.
4. *Public conduct during the emergency routine*: The public behaved commendably, largely due to the Home Front Command's effective, simple, and focused risk communication. In the current round, in which some two-thirds of the public was

- directly exposed to attacks, there was a successful combination of understanding of the real personal threat, realization that it is possible and easy to save lives using simple tools, and willingness to act in accordance with the civil defense instructions. The significant increase in the number of zones of alert (now some 200) greatly reduced the frequency of sirens per zone and population, and consequently diminished the rate of interference with the civilian routine. This enabled the public to maintain an almost normal routine, reducing unnecessary activity to a reasonable degree, so that the damage to the economy, excluding the south, was relatively little. One may assume that the future wide scale use of a mobile warning system (text messages to individual cell phones), already partly introduced during this operation, will add to this dimension.
5. *The public attitudes:* Generally speaking, the public so far exhibited a relatively high sense of personal safety, despite the rocket threat, mostly because of the success of the Iron Dome system. On the other hand, it is unclear if the public is aware of the system's limitations and the level of threat to which it might be exposed in a future round. There was also a widespread sense of solidarity and patriotism, including sweeping support for the political, not to mention the military leaderships, as well for the option of an extended military offensive, despite the high losses. At the fringes of the public arena were phenomena of extremism and hatred in the streets, including intentional violence by marginal groups on the right against the left and between Jews and Arabs. These destructive phenomena must be dealt with severely in a systemic manner before they penetrate into the mainstream and affect the general public discourse.
 6. *The area surrounding the Gaza Strip:* The phenomenon of the terrorist tunnels has created a new threat reality in the settlements of this area, which contributed to a mass exodus of the residents of the area. It is still too early to assess the severity of these phenomena and their cumulative effect over time. It is clear that even if most of the tunnels are destroyed, it will be necessary to construct updated military, technological, and civilian defense methods and systems capable of dealing with this threat, as well as ways to manage the public conduct.

The Israeli public continues to meet the severe challenges of Operation Protective Edge in an outstanding manner. It provides the necessary support for the political and military moves, and has demonstrated a high level of societal resilience. This has been manifested primarily in maintaining an appropriate level of functional continuity in the framework of the emergency routine, including in the center of the country, which was previously not exposed in such a manner to repeated attacks.