

Hezbollah Round 2

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The Israeli Air Force learned from the 2006 campaign against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, that it would have to change its tactics. The new methods were successfully demonstrated during the recent 22 day campaign against Hamas in Gaza. But now the air force warns that they could not replicate those tactics in another war with Hezbollah. The main reasons are a shortage of AH-64 attack helicopters and qualified air force officers to serve as ground controllers for the infantry battalions and brigades. There would also be less timely intel, because UAVs and aircraft would be watching a larger area. There would also be less ground intel, because the Israeli informant network is much thicker in Gaza than it is in southern Lebanon.

Before 2006, the air force had convinced the government that it was on top of Hezbollah military preparations in southern Lebanon, and could take down the terrorist rocket stockpiles with air attacks. Ground troops would not be necessary, or would have little to do if sent in. The Israeli generals were wrong. In the first ten days of the 2006 operations, the air force took out 150 known targets. But it turned out that Hezbollah had a lot more down on, and under, the ground than the air force intelligence knew about. The air force had a hard time finding those additional rocket stockpiles, and bunkers full of Hezbollah fighters. The army had to be hastily mobilized and sent into a battle they were not prepared for.

Thirty months later, the Israeli Air Force had cleaned up its act, or so it appeared. In the first ten days of fighting in Gaza, the air force destroyed over 500 targets, using 555 fighter and 125 attack helicopter sorties. More importantly, a new intelligence approach, and new sensors, have made it possible for the air force to keep finding new targets. Part of this was due to the air force forming a tighter link with the other intel organizations (army, Mossad, Shin Bet and foreign nations), and increasing the speed at which intel is collected, processed, and passed back to the combat aircraft in the form of target information.

The Israelis are using more high resolution targeting pods, including some using high rez (SAR) radar for all-weather ground surveillance. This gave them more information, more quickly. This was aided by greater use, than ever before, of UAVs. The Gaza battle areas were under intense UAV surveillance 24/7 for the entire operations. This explains how the air force was able to generate a constant supply of new targets. Hamas was suitably shocked. There was a higher than expected use of faked bomb victim stories, which was largely attributable to the greater precision with which the air force is identifying and hitting targets. Hamas was in disarray, having been hit with a more devastating attack than their Hezbollah advisors had endured.

As a result, Hezbollah began planning to deal with these new Israeli tactics during a second round of fighting in southern Lebanon. This is another reason for the Israeli Air Force going public with their misgivings. Then again, the Israelis know how to play the intelligence game, and are also seeking to mislead Hezbollah about what might happen during a rematch.

The U.S. has supplied Israel with just about every smart bomb in the American arsenal. Not just to help out an ally, but so that American and Israeli air force planners can compare notes after this is all over. But the Israelis used few smart bombs in Gaza. In order to minimize civilian casualties, the air force relied more on over a thousand guided missiles (Hellfires and TOWs) fired from helicopters.

Israel only has 46 AH-64s, but several hundred F-16s that can drop smart bombs. So any operations in southern Lebanon would involve lots more smart bomb. Moreover, Gaza is much more densely populated than southern Lebanon, making it safer to use smart bombs without undue danger to civilians (who would be warned by Israel to get out beforehand.) Israel is no doubt working up some surprises for Hezbollah, what they might be won't be revealed until the shooting starts.

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