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IAF chief: What took us 34 days in 2006 in Lebanon, we can now do in 48 hours

• By YONAH JEREMY BOB



AMIR ESHEL
(IDC)

The Israel Air Force would “act with full force from the beginning” in any potential next war with Lebanon, IAF Commander Maj.-Gen. Amir Eshel said Wednesday in a firm warning to Hezbollah.

“What we could do in 34 days during the Second Lebanon War, we can now do in 48 hours. The growth of our strength has not been linear,” he told the Herzliya Conference at the Interdisciplinary Center on Wednesday.

The IAF has not only improved in the speed with which it can attack, but also the volume said Eshel, noting that the IDF could hit Hezbollah “with four to five times” the bombing power it used during the 2006 war.

In addition, Eshel warned civilians in southern Lebanon to leave their homes if war with Israel breaks out, saying, “one in every four or five homes has weapons hidden in it,” leaving the air force no

choice but to strike.

At the same time he emphasized, “We are doing whatever possible to reduce any collateral damage to civilians in any war, and we aspire toward zero civilian casualties. But I cannot delude myself; in every war there will always be people who are harmed inadvertently.

Eshel also hinted at reported Israeli strikes on Hezbollah weapons caches in Syria. He indicated that such strikes are

more complex now with Russian and US fighter jets in the region.

“The skies over the Middle East are very congested, much more so than in the past,” he stated.

He explored the question of how the IDF can “operationally act aggressively and with determination” against terrorism and threats, while “avoiding full war if possible.”

Part of the key, he said, was strategic use of air power at times to send diplomatic messages to Israel’s adversaries about its red lines for levels of attacks it will not tolerate.

Moreover, in a veiled reference to Iran and other adversaries, he said the air force must plan for potential long-term threats as “we cannot wake up too late to deal with a new threat. The price of mistakes is intolerable.”

Israel and Hezbollah fought a 34-day armed conflict in the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Tensions have since again risen

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on Israel’s northern border with Hezbollah’s involvement on the side of the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war.

Since the last war with Israel, the Iranian-backed Lebanese Shi’ite terrorist group has reportedly stockpiled as many as 150,000 rockets and other projectiles capable of reaching anywhere in Israel.

Meanwhile, Israel has bolstered its missile-defense apparatus, deploying Iron Dome for short-range, David’s Sling for mid-range, and Arrow projectile interceptors for long-range use.

Jerusalem Post Staff contributed to this report.