



The 2006 Origins of Israel's Multi-domain Post-October 7 Warfare Strategy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Israel's failed 2006 war against Hezbollah spurred IDF doctrinal and force structure changes that were ultimately embodied in its Momentum Multiyear Plan of 2020. The resulting full spectrum *multi-domain* warfare strategy contributed to Israel's 2024 military success against Iran's strongest proxy. Jerusalem's Northern Arrows campaign devastated Hezbollah's military, unleashing forces that upended Iran's "ring of fire" strategy and compromised the Islamic Republic's survival.

Introduction

In the last three years, Israel has routed Iran's Axis of Resistance. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) killed much of the senior leadership of Hamas and Hezbollah as well as 29,000 Hamas and over 5,000 Hezbollah militants, crippling its enemies' combat effectiveness. Israel's 2024 war in Lebanon destroyed over half of Hezbollah's rockets and missiles.

The depletion of Iran's once powerful proxies allowed Jerusalem to attack Iran directly. The Twelve Days' War in June 2025 devastated the Islamic Republic's missile and nuclear capabilities and killed dozens of its army commanders and nuclear scientists. Israel's Operation Rising Lion presaged the current US-Israel war against the Islamic Republic, further aggravating Iran's military erosion.

From Tehran to Beirut, Iran's Axis of Resistance has been weakened. The IDF has attacked the Houthis, Hezbollah, Hamas, the Iraqi PMF, and Iran itself. Israel's post-October 7 wars have upended the Middle East regional order.

Israel's military success against the Iranian insurgent proxies is surprising. The IDF's crumbling of Tehran's surrogates defied post-War on Terror thinking about the lack of utility of military power against decentralized insurgent networks.

Deemed by analysts to possess an insurmountable asymmetric advantage in warfare, Islamist insurgent groups have indeed historically bested conventional armies. Analyst pessimism was reinforced by Israel's bitter Lebanon experience. During Jerusalem's 17 years of occupation, the army lost roughly a thousand Israeli soldiers. The Shia insurgent group Hezbollah, armed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC), fought a short but effective war against the IDF six years after its Lebanon withdrawal.

Experts saw Hezbollah's resilience against the militarily superior IDF as a major success, and Hezbollah itself viewed the 2006 conflict as a divine victory. The perceived failure of Western armies against jihadist insurgents in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon reinforced conclusions about the ineffectiveness of state militaries in the post-Cold War era.

The literature on the asymmetric advantages of insurgent war is vast. It contains "forever war" narratives according to which conventional armies are doomed to fail against decentralized terrorist networks. Israel's success against Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran contradicts this view.

Analysts were quick to dismiss Israel's post-October 7 military campaign as falling into a Hamas trap, with the IDF fated to sink into a military quagmire in Gaza. Yet the dire predictions of another jihadist victory failed to come to pass. Israel's military success has upended conventional thinking about best practices when fighting insurgents.

How did Israel achieve this outcome?

Jerusalem's successful *multi-domain* warfare strategy was developed after its failed 2006 war against Hezbollah. Israel's post-2006 war doctrine married

conventional and asymmetric techniques while capitalizing on technological innovations that exploited Hezbollah's vulnerabilities in 2024.

The IDF's strategy evolved over a decade into a new doctrine so audacious in its use of military and intelligence warfare that it took a shock on the scale of the October 7 catastrophe to unleash it.

The legacy of the 2006 war

Israel's success was facilitated by Hezbollah's organizational evolution into a conventional terror army. Far from remaining a decentralized insurgent network, Hezbollah morphed into a quasi-state with conventional assets and defensive infrastructure.

Israel discovered during the 2006 war that Hezbollah had a huge arsenal (missiles, rockets, and drones) equal to that of a state army – one whose military organization was reinforced by a multibillion-dollar, fortified, bomb-resistant underground tunnel system.

The conflict began after Hezbollah guerrillas killed three IDF border guards and kidnapped two soldiers. The war lasted just 34 days. It was dominated by a prolonged Israeli bombing campaign that devastated Lebanon's civilian population and infrastructure without inflicting decisive losses on Hezbollah.

Israel's inability to stem Hezbollah rocket fire underscored the weakness of its defensive and offensive operations. The army's ineptitude was reinforced by a poorly executed land incursion during which the army registered heavy losses and made few territorial advances. Israeli armor was hurt by sustained fire from Hezbollah's rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and anti-tank missiles.

After a month of inconclusive fighting, a UN-mediated ceasefire was brokered in Lebanon. Hezbollah saw its survival as divine victory. Though Hassan Nasrallah later admitted that Hezbollah's 2006 war was a costly mistake, perceptions endured of Israel's "defeat".

Hezbollah exhibited formidable military capability during this brief war. With Iranian and North Korean support, Hezbollah had developed into a mini-state equipped with sophisticated weaponry fortified by underground tunnels.

Hezbollah's tunnel networks and extensive rocket arsenal proved resistant to Israeli airstrikes.

Israeli intelligence failed to comprehensively assess Hezbollah's military capabilities and the significance of its defensive fortifications. Though the IDF was able to degrade Hezbollah's precision-guided missiles arsenal, it proved ineffective at suppressing rocket fire into Israel.

Nor was that Israel's only error. Jerusalem's failings during the war included insufficient political will, unclear goals, poor leadership, overreliance on air power, weak reserve training and a risk-averse strategy focused on not taking casualties.

Critically, the commanders responsible for security along Israel's northern frontier with Lebanon were excluded from the war's strategic planning. The Winograd Commission, which was formed after the 2006 conflict to investigate the conduct of the war, concluded that Israel had failed at the strategic, tactical and operational levels.

Throughout the conflict, air power and special forces operations alone were shown to be insufficient to defeat an organized terrorist army. Israel's inept performance during the war, which included a disabled naval frigate hit by a Hezbollah precision-guided missile, rocked Israel's national security and intelligence apparatus.

Israel's underestimation of Hezbollah's capability impelled the Mossad to improve its efforts at intelligence collection. The object was to integrate human, artificial intelligence and technological assets more effectively to better assess enemy capabilities and vulnerabilities.

The 2006 War forced Israel to create a multi-layered air defense shield to protect its populace from future Hezbollah rockets and missiles. In 2011, Israel developed its Iron Dome system, an integrated system of interceptors, radars, and command centers aimed at blunting Hezbollah rocket and artillery fire.

Jerusalem expanded its multi-layered air defense system to include a variety of anti-missile defense systems. Its Sling and Terminal High Altitude Area

Defense (THAAD) intercept system are designed to interdict missiles at varying altitudes and ranges.

The IDF also reformed its offensive operations after the 2006 War, changing its force structure, training and strategy. This included adopting a “back to basics” methodology involving longer reserve training periods, enhanced armor protection, combined infantry-armor exercises, and better interservice integration. These reforms resulted in a force equipped to combat a terror army.

Exploiting Hezbollah’s expansion

In 2014, Hezbollah massively intervened in Syria’s civil war in support of the Assad regime against Sunni jihadi rebels. Israel hoped to prevent the military entrenchment of Hezbollah and Iran in Syria. Hundreds of IDF airstrikes hit IRGC and Hezbollah weapons convoys, munitions factories, armaments depots and troops across Syria.

By the late 2010s, Hezbollah had developed a bureaucratic structure vulnerable to conventional military power and intelligence penetration. With over 50,000 fighters and reserve forces, barracks, and payment and contracting systems, Hezbollah’s organizational development offered Israeli intelligence multiple access points.

By 2019, Hezbollah was the crown jewel in Tehran’s pan-national Shia terrorist-insurgent force. However, Hezbollah’s Syrian involvement resulted in the killing or wounding of thousands of its fighters, and its Syrian gambit proved unpopular in Lebanon. With its forces fighting in Syria and its network ferreting arms and trainers to Iranian-supported Shia militias in Yemen and Iraq, Hezbollah’s faux nationalist bona fides were exposed.

The 2020 Momentum Multiyear Plan

Iran’s support for its Lebanese, Syrian, Yemeni and Iraqi proxies forced Israel to devise a new doctrine of offensive warfare. IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi built upon his predecessor’s prior reforms and orchestrated an in-depth critical thinking process across military and intelligence units to refine a strategy to weaken Iran’s pan-Shia regional project.

Crafted during 2019-2020, the IDF's Momentum Multiyear Plan redefined Israel's frontline enemies as terror armies best combated through *multi-domain warfare* aimed at rapidly destroying enemy combat capability while incurring minimal casualties. Kochavi's doctrine emphasized integrating asymmetric and conventional warfare techniques to achieve rapid operational victory.

After the 2006 war, Israel began constructing a Digital Land Army, or DLA. Drones, satellite images and artificial intelligence techniques were pooled into centralized information systems to target enemy commanders, combat units, weapons depots, and communication systems. After October 7, infantry and tank units were equipped with drones to facilitate real-time targeting of enemy forces.

The Momentum Multiyear Plan envisioned digitally integrated, intelligence-driven, mass-precision air- and land strikes to rapidly destroy enemy military capabilities with the smallest possible number of IDF casualties.

Hezbollah and IRGC military involvement in Syria created a potential third front that jeopardized Israeli security. The IDF's "war between the wars" (Mabam) was designed to degrade Iran's support for its proxies across Syria.

Israel's technological advancements in drone weaponization, satellite imaging and improved human intelligence allowed it to better identify Hezbollah-IRGC weapons convoys and target enemy military installations.

Jerusalem aimed to weaken Iran's Axis of Resistance project at the periphery before taking the war to Tehran. It would, however, take a major event to unleash the full destructive potential of Israel's *multi-domain* warfare strategy. The slaughter of 1,200 Israelis by Hamas militants on October 7, 2023, provided the existential impetus for its application.

Israel's post-October 7 strategy against Hezbollah

Jerusalem's failure to prevent the Hamas assault on October 7 was a massive intelligence failure. Despite pre-attack warnings, the IDF's high command dismissed Hamas's offensive preparations as merely aspirational.

The savage assault by Hamas was followed by rocket fire from Hezbollah directed at Israeli northern border settlements. Faced with a debilitating

multifront existential war and insufficient land forces, Israel was forced to execute its post-2006 strategy sequentially.

The IDF's combined arms campaign toppled Hamas's jihadi state in Gaza, smashing the group's offensive capability. During its governance in Gaza, Hamas had created a terror army vulnerable to mass fire power.

By September 2024, Israel had rendered three-quarters of Hamas's brigades combat-inoperable and killed eighty percent of its senior leadership. Israel's seizure of Hamas's Egyptian arms supply corridor at Rafah severely compromised the Islamic Resistance Movement's outside support.

Only after Hamas was weakened could Israel use its full spectrum of warfighting against Hezbollah. Taking the war to Hezbollah was a critical step in breaking Iran's "ring of fire" strategy to destroy Israel.

With a 130,000 rocket-missile inventory and 50,000 militiamen, Hezbollah was Iran's strongest regional proxy. Weakening the Army of God would constitute a decisive blow to Tehran's regional strategy.

Unlike the 2006 conflict, Israel's 2024 Northern Arrows campaign was a *multi-domain* war waged to achieve operational victory. During the conflict, the IDF crippled Hezbollah's communications systems and decimated its senior leadership.

One year before its military offensive, Israel clandestinely sold Hezbollah contractors explosively timed pagers and radios. The Mossad planned to use these prepositioned explosives shortly before the IDF began its military campaign.

On September 17-18, 2024, Israel activated its explosively charged devices, disabling thousands of Hezbollah militants. After degrading the group's communication system, Israeli airstrikes targeted its senior leadership, killing Hassan Nasrallah and dozens of Hezbollah field commanders. Successive IDF bombing raids diminished Hezbollah's missile and rocket delivery systems.

Israel then invaded South Lebanon to destroy Hezbollah's North Korean-fabricated tunnel system, with IDF special forces degrading the tunnel network shielding the group's missile stockpiles.

With over 5,000 of its members killed and 13,000 wounded, Hezbollah suffered a forty-five percent casualty rate, crippling its operational capability. This was triple the losses the IDF had been able to inflict on Hezbollah in the 2006 war.

Half of Hezbollah's rocket and missile infrastructure was reportedly destroyed, forcing the group to accept a humiliating ceasefire. Israel's Northern Arrows air-land campaign achieved operational victory by soundly defeating Hezbollah in two months of devastating warfare.

Israel's disruption of Hezbollah rocket fire was enabled by its improved rocket defense systems and intelligence-driven precision strike capability. Since 2006, advances in drone and satellite technologies have allowed Israel to locate and neutralize Hezbollah mobile rocket and missile fire with ninety percent of salvos intercepted.

Unlike the 2006 war, Israel launched ground operations early on, with its armor supported by anti-tank weapon defenses, infantry and drones. The IDF's South Lebanon incursion suppressed Hezbollah rocket fire by pushing enemy forces out of range of Israeli territory. Special forces conducted anti-tunnel raids to disable subterranean weapons depots, stockpiles and command centers.

Under the 2024 ceasefire, the Lebanese army was tasked with demilitarizing Lebanon to secure Israel's northern border. Though Hezbollah retains considerable forces north of the Litani River, its southern military position has been compromised.

The Northern Arrows campaign exemplified the IDF's *multi-domain* war doctrine, established in the 2020 Momentum Multi-Year Plan. The degrading of Hezbollah's terror army had significant geo-military consequences.

The strategic impact of Israel's post-October 7 wars

An enfeebled Hezbollah was unable to assist the Assad regime when, in December 2024, it faced resurgent Sunni jihadists. Russian support for its Syrian ally, moreover, was constrained by its involvement in the Ukraine war. Deprived of external support, the Assad regime crumbled one month after Israel's trouncing of Hezbollah.

With Assad overthrown, Hamas weakened and Hezbollah devastated, the IDF carried its *multi-domain* war to Iran. Following its 2024 Hezbollah war playbook, Israel's June 2025 Operation Rising Lion decimated Iran's senior military command and key scientists.

Over 30 IRGC commanders and 13 nuclear scientists were assassinated, many through Israeli drone attacks conducted within Iran. Facilitating the success of this leadership decapitation was the precision of the Mossad's information about the IRGC's command structure.

Leadership decapitation was followed by a mass aerial assault in which IDF jets targeted regime military-industrial infrastructure. Following the Momentum Multi-Year Plan, Israel used both asymmetric and conventional weapons against Iran, a combined strategy that was enabled by improved intelligence collection (both human and satellite) and new technological advances.

IDF offensive operations crippled Iran's retaliatory capability. Though Iran launched hundreds of ballistic missiles against Israel, ninety percent were intercepted by Israel's multi-level missile defense systems.

Since October 7, Israel has upended Iran's "ring of fire" strategy and threatened the Islamic Republic's very existence. The severe losses experienced by Hezbollah during the 2024 war heavily constrain the Lebanese militia's ability to support Iran.

The IDF's 2026 attacks against the Army of God combined with Beirut's US-backed efforts to disarm the group further Hezbollah's organizational erosion. Though Hezbollah has not been vanquished, its prospects are grim.

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