

The Evolution of the Israel Defence Forces' Information Operations: A Case Study of the Israel Defence Forces' Activities in the Information Domain 2006-2014

Authors : Teemu Saressalo

Abstract : This article examines the evolution of the Israel Defence Forces' information operation activities during an eight-year timespan from the 2006 war with Hezbollah to more recent operations such as Pillar of Defence and Protective Edge. To this end, the case study will show a change in the Israel Defence Forces' activities in the information domain. In the 2006 war with Hezbollah in Lebanon, Israel inflicted enormous damage on the Lebanese infrastructure, leaving more than 1,200 people dead and 4,400 injured. Casualties among Hezbollah, Israel's main adversary, were estimated to range from 250 to 700 fighters. Damage to the Lebanese infrastructure was estimated at over USD 2.5bn, with almost 2,000 houses and buildings damaged and destroyed. Even this amount of destruction did not force Hezbollah to yield and while both sides were claiming victory in the war, Israel paid a heavier price in political backlashes and loss of reputation, mainly due to failures in the media and the way in which the war was portrayed and perceived in Israel and abroad. Much of this can be credited to Hezbollah's efficient use of the media, and Israel's failure to do so. Israel managed the next conflict it was engaged in completely differently – it had learnt its lessons and built up new ways to counter its adversary's propaganda and media operations. In Operation Cast Lead at the turn of 2009, Hamas, Israel's adversary and Gaza's dominating faction, was not able to utilize the media in the same way that Hezbollah had. By creating a virtual and physical barrier around the Gaza Strip, Israel almost totally denied its adversary access to the worldwide media, and by restricting the movement of journalists in the area, Israel could let its voice be heard above all. The operation Cast Lead began with a deception operation, which caught Hamas totally off guard. The 21-day campaign left the Gaza Strip devastated, but did not cause as much protest in Israel during the operation as the 2006 war did, mainly due to almost total Israeli dominance in the information dimension. The most important outcome from the Israeli perspective was the fact that Operation Cast Lead was assessed to be a success and the operation enjoyed domestic support along with support from many western nations, which had condemned Israeli actions in the 2006 war. Later conflicts have shown the same tendency towards virtually total dominance in the information domain, which has had an impact on target audiences across the world. Thus, it is clear that well-planned and conducted information operations are able to shape public opinion and influence decision-makers, although Israel might have been outpaced by its rivals.

Keywords : Hamas, Hezbollah, information operations, Israel Defence Forces

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