

APRIL

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Subterranean Environment: Tunnel to Victory, the 2006 Lebanon War



[TRADOC G-2 Intelligence Support Activity \(TRISA\)](#)

Complex Operational Environment and Threat Integration Directorate (CTID)



Purpose

- To provide information on threat use of the subterranean environment.
- To inform the Army training community of the Hezbollah's use of the subterranean environment during the 2006 Lebanon War.

Executive Summary

- In 2006, Hezbollah was able to achieve tactical, operational, and even strategic victory through its use of the subterranean environment.
- Hezbollah, an example of the irregular element of the hybrid threat construct, created a complex integrated network of underground tunnels and bunkers throughout southern Lebanon as a key component of its *planned defense*.
- Hezbollah's use of the subterranean environment can be broken up into three main functions: cache sites, command and control (C2) facilities, and defensive positions. While these functions are separate and distinct, it is important to note that Hezbollah's underground facilities (UGF) system was integrated. Many defensive positions also provided a key cache site and many C2 nodes were located alongside caches and in defensive positions.
- In Hezbollah's creation of its network of tunnels and bunkers, it took into consideration not only the defensive characteristics of the terrain but also known Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) avenues of approach to ensure that its concealed firing positions and defensive positions could be exploited to the maximum.

Cover photo: [Map of Israel and Lebanon](#)



Map

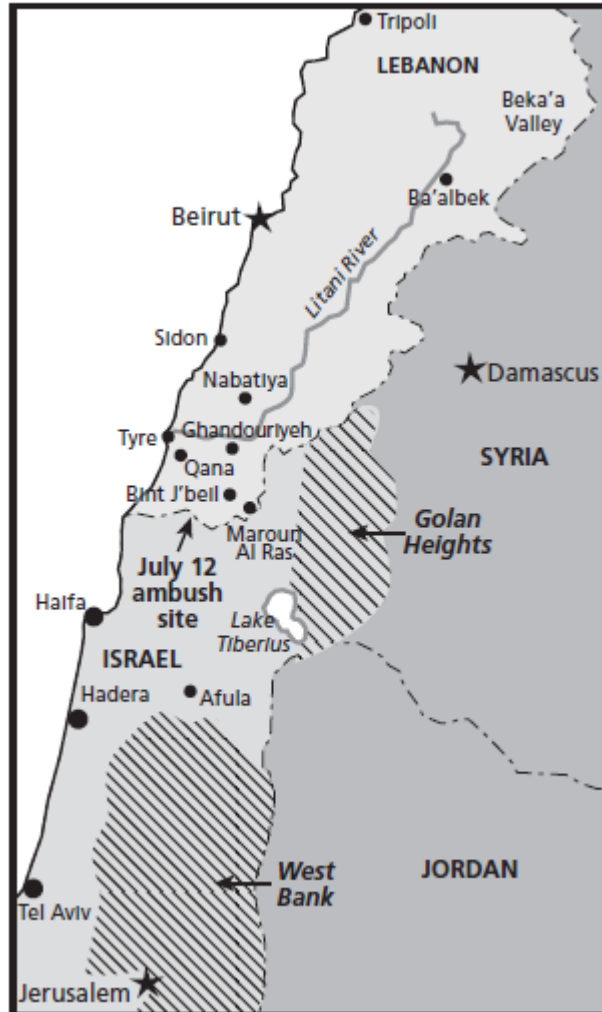


Figure 1: South Lebanon and border area

The Subterranean Environment

The subterranean environment is a subcondition of the operational environment (OE) infrastructure variable. The subterranean environment is particularly important for the US military to understand as it represents a potential area of vulnerability for US forces. This is because, when properly exploited by the threat, it provides countermeasures and a very effective level of protection against weapons systems and intelligence collection assets. Adversaries of the US and its allies have shown time and time again that they are extremely adept at their use of this type of environment, which consequently presents a situation in which a threat could potentially overmatch the US despite the US's technological superiority.

When viewed through the hybrid threat construct of *regular forces*, *irregular forces*, and *criminal elements*, historical examples of the threats exploiting the subterranean environment to their advantage abound, from the Vietnam War (combination of *regular* and *irregular* forces) to modern day Korea (*regular force*), Afghanistan (*irregular forces*), and the US/Mexican border (*criminal elements*). Repeatedly, adversaries typically seen as technologically inferior have secured tactical, operational, and even strategic victories over the US through their adept use of the subterranean environment.

Perhaps the most recent, detailed example of the proficient use of the subterranean environment was by Hezbollah in 2006 during the Second Lebanon War.¹ This Threat Report will use the example Hezbollah set during this war to assess how an *irregular element* of the hybrid threat construct could exploit the subterranean environment, and will identify tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) associated with this exploitation.

Summary of the 2006 Lebanon War

The 2006 Lebanon War was years in the making. In 2000, when the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) withdrew from south Lebanon, Hezbollah began preparation for its *planned defense* anticipating a day when it would be required to defend southern Lebanon from the IDF.² This preparation included building an intricate and secret military infrastructure throughout southern Lebanon that consisted of tunnels, bunkers, and observation posts all supplied with stockpiles of large quantities of artillery rockets, anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs), mortars, food, water, and medical supplies.

In July 2006, Hezbollah initiated an indirect fire attack into northern Israel in order to create a diversion that concealed the operation of an *ambush* element targeting an IDF convoy.

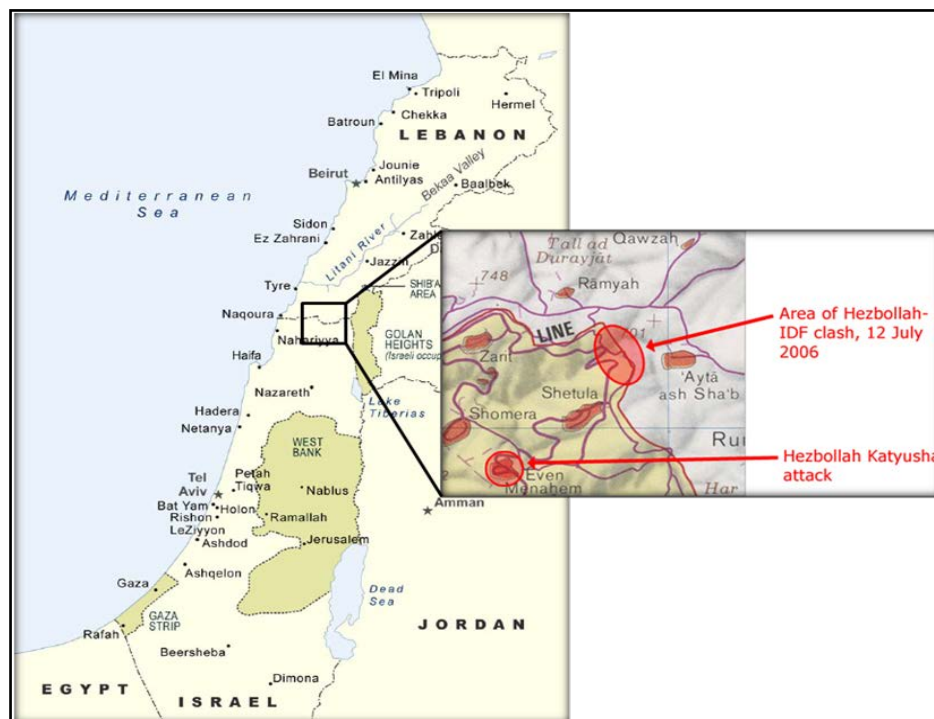


Figure 2: Hezbollah's attack on 12 July 2006

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Hezbollah successfully attacked the convoy and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. This action resulted in a military response from Israel that embroiled the region in war.

Israel's first offensive operations of the war consisted of a combination of air and artillery strikes designed to accomplish two objectives; the first was to destroy Hezbollah's long-range rocket launchers and the second was to deny Hezbollah freedom of movement with the kidnapped IDF soldiers.

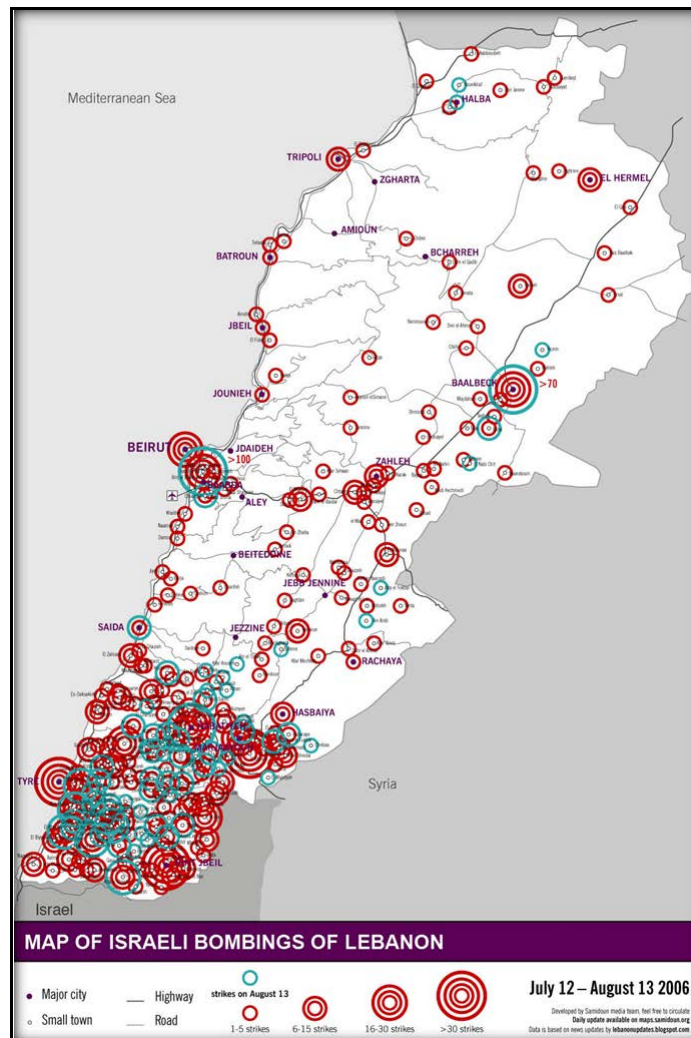


Figure 3: Map of Israeli bombings of Lebanon

To achieve these goals, Israeli military forces targeted bridges and roads, Hezbollah command posts, long range missile locations, and other military targets. However, despite Israel's air and artillery campaigns, Hezbollah was able to continually fire rockets into Israel at a rate of more than 100 a day.

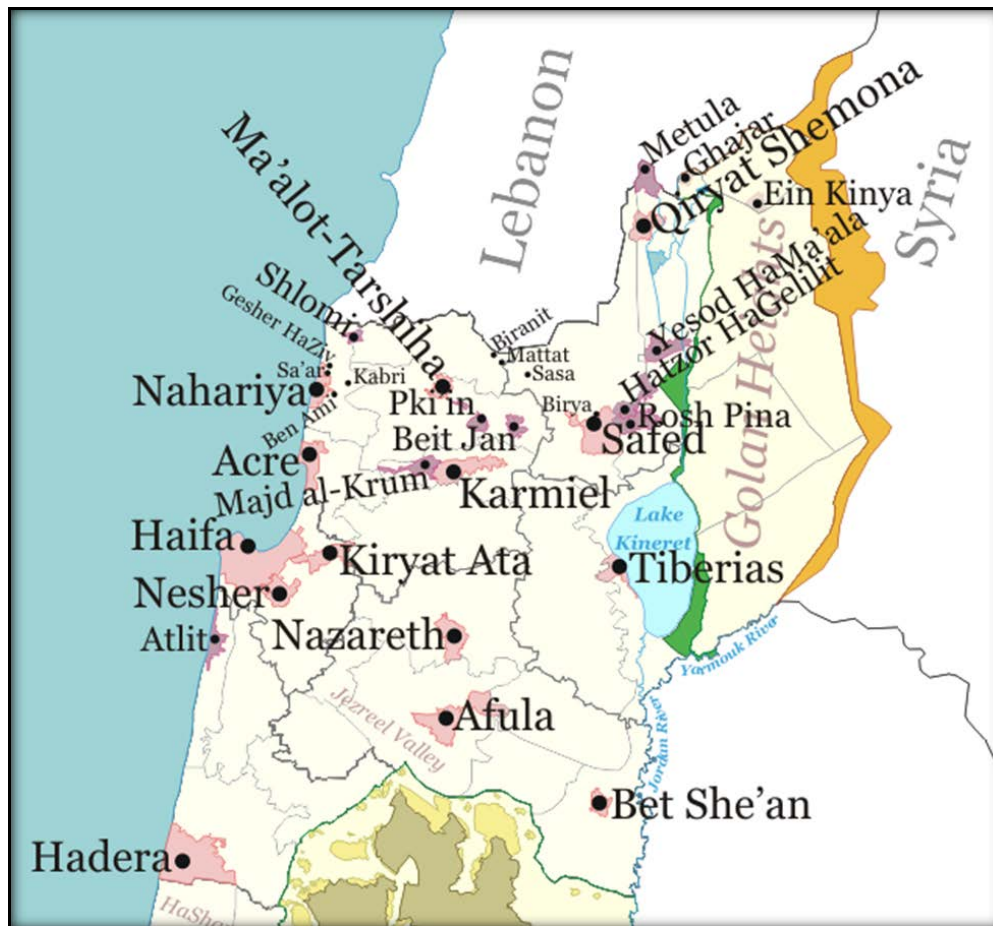


Figure 4: Areas hit by Hezbollah rockets during the war

In an effort to stem this onslaught, “craft a consciousness of victory for the Israelis, and a cognitive perception of defeat for Hezbollah,” Israel initiated a ground campaign and engaged with Hezbollah fighters.³ It was at this point that the IDF, and the world, were confronted with the magnitude of Hezbollah’s defensive positions, tactical skill, and armament. As an IDF soldier put it, “We expected a tent and three Kalashnikovs—that was the intelligence we were given. Instead, we found a hydraulic steel door leading to a well-equipped network of tunnels” full of highly trained Hezbollah fighters equipped with flak jackets, night-vision goggles, communications equipment, and in some cases even Israeli uniforms and equipment.⁴ Hezbollah’s defenses throughout southern Lebanon were impressive. Not only in its use of the subterranean environment but also with its pre-planned *ambush* locations, pre-planned logistic routes, seeded minefields, other tactical defense positions.

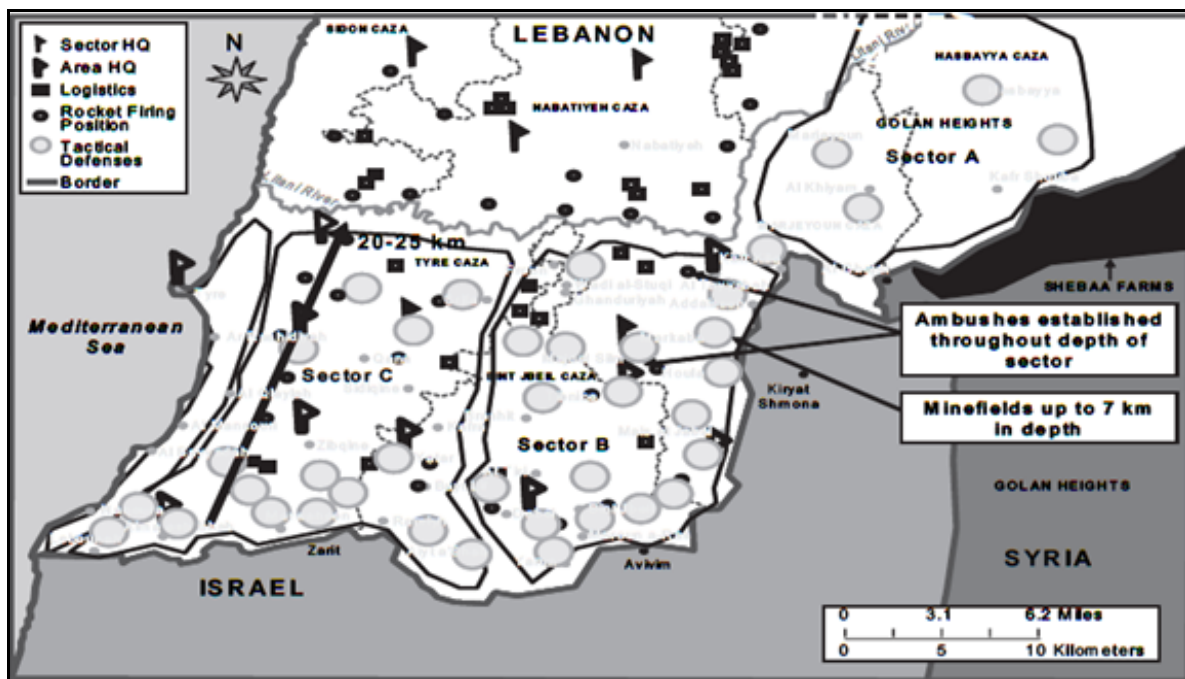


Figure 5: Hezbollah defenses in southern Lebanon

Hezbollah not only held its own against the Israeli military, it was able to dominate the information warfare (INFOWAR) campaign. While Israeli news stations were condemning the IDF for what it called “idiotic military maneuvers,” a Hezbollah television station continued broadcasting reports of Hezbollah’s success against the IDF.⁵ However, after over a month of conflict, a UN-brokered ceasefire ended hostilities on 14 August 2006 leaving organizations and governments around the world with differing opinions on which side could claim victory. In the end Israel successfully got a ceasefire signed with the conditions it wanted attached but Hezbollah remained intact, now a successful political *and* military force to be reckoned with in Lebanon.

Plenty has been written on Israel’s ground campaign assessing it as a failure for the IDF in terms of planning, training, and doctrine.⁶ However, this war also presents an excellent opportunity to study how an element of the hybrid threat construct, an *irregular force*, can use the subterranean environment to its advantage and overmatch a technologically superior foe.

Hezbollah’s Use of the Subterranean Environment

Hezbollah’s success in this conflict can be directly attributed to the considerable efforts it devoted to constructing its extensive defensive infrastructure and establishing distributed caches of supplies throughout southern Lebanon.⁷ Neither of these could have happened without Hezbollah’s use of the subterranean environment.

The subterranean environment is commonly used to create infrastructure, or underground facilities (UGFs), designed to fulfill a variety of mission areas such as: weapons of mass destruction (WMD) storage, missile production and/or storage, cache site, and basing for command and control (C2).⁸

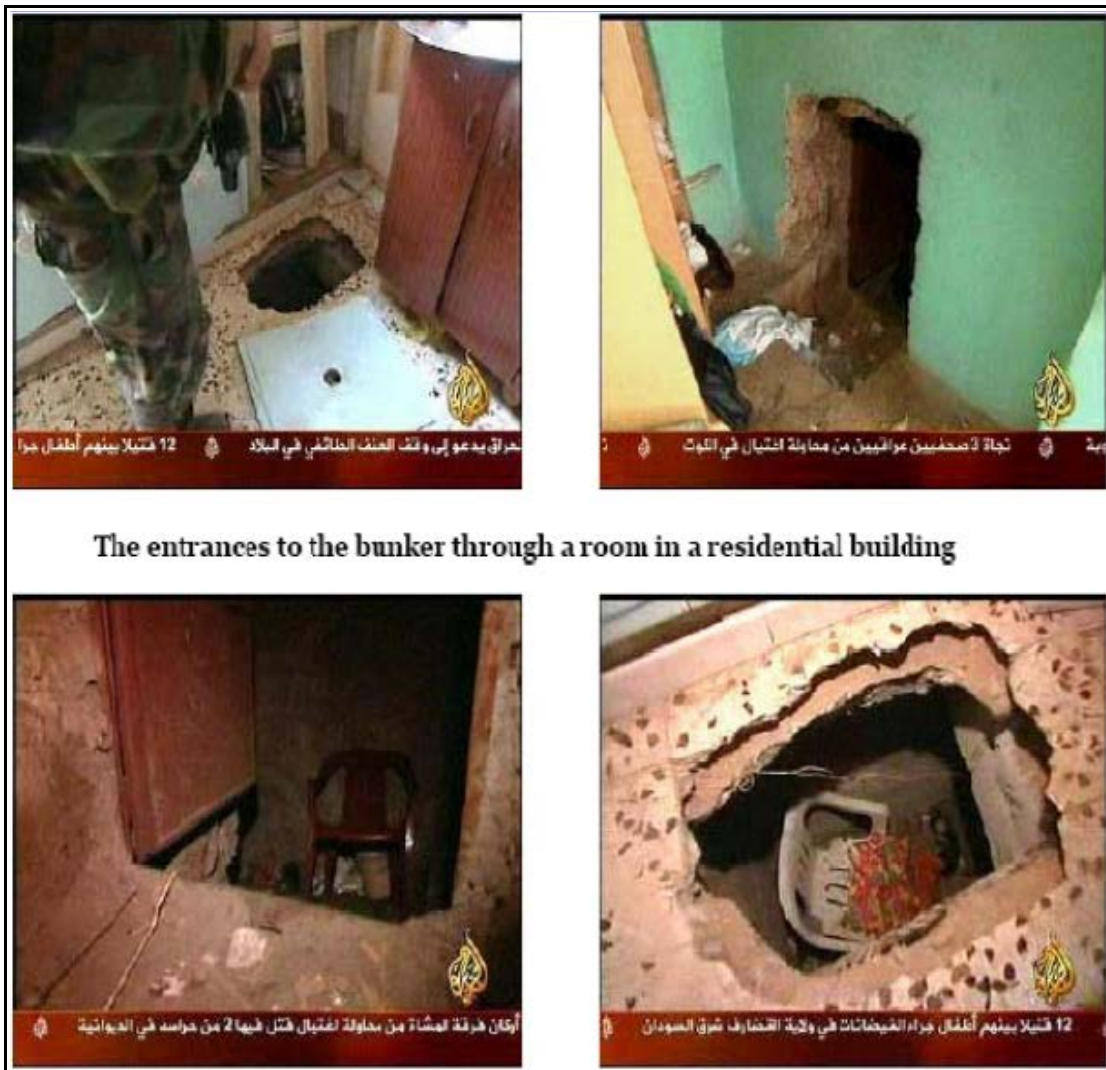


Hezbollah, in preparation for potential conflict with Israel, spent years prepping southern Lebanon in a *planned defense*. Integral to this defense were UGFs designed to provide just these types of functions.



Figure 6: Entrances to some of Hezbollah's bunkers

By the time the 2006 Lebanon War kicked off, Hezbollah had a robust bunker and tunnel network spread out through most of southern Lebanon. In general, Hezbollah's bunkers were "40 meters underground, covering an area of two square kilometers, that included firing positions, operations centers, connecting tunnels, medical facilities, weapons and ammunition stockpiles, ventilation and air conditioning, bathrooms with hot and cold running water, and dormitories, all with a roof built of slabs of reinforced concrete almost three feet thick."⁹ These advanced facilities provided the following functions: cache site, C2 facility, and defensive positions. These functions ultimately were what gave Hezbollah freedom of movement on the battlefield, a condition that enabled their tactical and operational successes for the duration of the war.



The entrances to the bunker through a room in a residential building

Figure 7: Hezbollah used residential buildings to mask entrances to the underground network

Mission Area 1: Cache Site



Figure 8: Military materiel recovered from Hezbollah's bunker sites

One of the most common uses for the subterranean environment around the world is its storage of key military materiel. Materiel associated with weapons of mass destruction, key missile systems, key air defense systems, or simple ammo and weapon caches are known to be stored in UGFs in countries around the world. In the case of Hezbollah during the 2006 war, bunkers and tunnels were used to stockpile everything from weapons and ammunition to food and water. Hezbollah had enough supplies stockpiled to sustain a large number of fighters for weeks without resupply.¹⁰

It is important to note that not only did Hezbollah have access to a significant number of supplies, it had stockpiles of supplies and materiel that were far more advanced than anyone had suspected, all hidden deep in its bunkers. In fact, "no terrorist organization had ever before enjoyed access to anything like the sophisticated assets now known to be in Hezbollah's possession."¹¹ Among Hezbollah's small arms, food, and water were long- and medium-range surface-to-surface rockets, advanced communications equipment, improvised explosive devices (believed to be from Iran and Syria), and highly effective antitank guided missiles (ATGMs) including the RPG-29 and the AT-14 Kornet.¹² Without its bunker and tunnel network, it is highly unlikely that Hezbollah would have been able to amass the collection of arms it had and store it as close to the Israeli border as it did.



Figure 9: Entrance to underground Hezbollah warehouse and explosives room

Mission Area 2: C2 Facility

It is sound military procedure to base command and control elements of the force in the most protected areas available. This is precisely what Hezbollah did with its C2 elements, from operational-level leaders to its strategic leadership, Hezbollah's bunkers and tunnels provided a safe location from which ground operations were planned and led.



Figure 10: Hezbollah network operations center in UGF in Lebanon

In an effort to disrupt Hezbollah's leadership's communication channels, the Israeli government targeted all known military infrastructure and even targeted some civilian infrastructure. Certain attacks, specifically ones targeting neighborhoods in Beirut, were Israel's attempts to take out the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah. However, Israel saw little military benefit in targeting these facilities as not only did they not get Nasrallah, their operations targeting Hezbollah's leadership did very little to impact Hezbollah's operations. This is due to the fact that Nasrallah, and other top leaders, were operating in protected buried bunkers that could not be breached by the munitions employed.¹³ Hezbollah's bunkers and tunnel networks provided a safe environment for its leaders to not only keep firm operational control over their offensive rocket units but also provide an avenue for transferring orders to the front.¹⁴

Mission Area 3: Defensive Positions

Perhaps the most important benefit of using the subterranean environment is its ability to provide protection for the people and materiel operating in the OE. During the 2006 war, Hezbollah took full advantage of this benefit by using its bunkers and tunnel networks specially designed to withstand Israeli air and artillery bombardment.¹⁵ In general, Hezbollah's bunkers were 40 meters underground, with roofs that were over three feet thick and double blast doors designed to protect living and working spaces from destructive overpressure generated by high-explosive munitions.¹⁶



Figure 11: Tunnel and double blast doors from Hezbollah UGF network

Not only did Hezbollah's bunkers provide a safe environment from air and artillery strikes, their construction enabled its fighters to be able to fight from dug-in defensive positions giving them a significant advantage over Israeli ground forces. The complicated ground array of underground tunnels and bunkers, mined areas, and antitank units equaled a thorough *planned defense*.¹⁷ In addition, Hezbollah's bunkers included access to pre-planned firing positions where fighters could attack the IDF from secure locations. There are many anecdotal stories of Hezbollah fighters emerging from the ground to quickly fire a shoulder-fired anti-tank missile, only to disappear again back into the tunnel network thereby preventing the IDF from being able to retaliate.¹⁸ The defensive positions afforded to Hezbollah due to their UGFs allowed Hezbollah to fulfill three key purposes of their defense: protecting personnel and equipment, restricting freedom of movement of the IDF, and controlling key pieces of terrain.

Subterranean Environment Exploitation and Victory

According to TC 7-100.2, *Opposing Force Tactics*, "defensive actions can lead to strategic victory if they force a stronger invading enemy to abandon his mission."¹⁹ It is very easy to argue that this is precisely what occurred in Lebanon in the summer of 2006. Once the ceasefire was signed, Hezbollah claimed victory in the war and was joined in its proclamations by Syria and Iran. Of course, Israel and the US claimed victory for Israel. However, given the strategic objectives of the participants, Hezbollah's goal to survive the Israeli onslaught and exact a substantial price from the Israelis for their offensive into Lebanon, and Israel's goal to disarm Hezbollah and de-militarize the Israeli-Lebanon border, it appears as though only Hezbollah was victorious.²⁰ Hezbollah, despite having lost some territory, personnel, and artillery systems during the war has not only survived, but appears to have actually flourished. It has accrued additional power and political legitimacy by securing positions in Lebanon's government and it has maintained its military arm by procuring weapon systems. It is likely storing these systems in the newly constructed underground bunker and tunnel network that it has created in southern Lebanon, just north of its positions from the 2006 war.²¹ In addition, Hezbollah's rhetoric condemning Israel for its



attacks on civilians throughout Lebanon has generated international condemnation on Israel's actions.²² These successful actions on Hezbollah's part all point to a strategic failure for Israel; however, the key component that clinches this war as a strategic failure was Israel's inability to disarm Hezbollah.

Israel's inability to complete this objective and Hezbollah's ability to achieve its own are directly tied to Hezbollah's successful exploitation of the subterranean environment. Hezbollah's creation of complex tunnel and bunker networks that supported three key mission areas – cache site, C2 facility, and defensive positions – granted it a strategic victory for the 2006 Lebanon War.

Training Implications

- Correctly emplaced and exploited subterranean environment (such as bunkers and tunnels) has a long history and has created a myriad of problems for scores of militaries across time and needs to be considered while conducting planning for unit training.
- US forces will likely have to conduct operations that account for threats from subterranean environments. The hybrid threat will likely employ this environment as a countermeasure to overcome any technological overmatch enjoyed by US forces.
- While the use of the subterranean environment discussed in this Threat Report occurred in 2006, the issue and the TTP are still relevant. As recently as 2012, Hezbollah, with the assistance of Iranian experts, upgraded existing tunnel networks and structures and began developing new tunnel networks in southern Lebanon.²³
- The evidence of the proliferation of TTP between non-traditional allies speaks volumes about the prolific nature of subterranean environment TTP. There was evidence that all of the underground facilities used by Hezbollah during the 2006 war were built between 2003 and 2004 under the supervision of North Korean experts.²⁴
- Hezbollah and Hamas now allegedly have more than 60,000 missiles and rockets – three times more than they had after the 2006 Lebanon war – and the majority of these systems are stockpiled and being concealed with the use of the subterranean environment.²⁵

Related Products

[TC 7-100.2, Opposing Force Tactics](#)

See the [Red Diamond Newsletter](#), which contains current articles on a variety of topics useful to both soldiers and civilians ranging from enemy TTP to the nature and analysis of various threat actors.

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Figure Credits

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Figure 11. Tunnel and double blast doors from Hezbollah UGF network. Source: [“Air Operations in Israel’s War Against Hezbollah.”](#) RAND Corporation. 2001.

End Notes

¹ For the purposes of this report, “Hezbollah” refers to the Lebanese Shiite Muslim group. Common alternate spellings include Hizballah, Hizbullah, and Hizb’allah.

² See TC 7-100.2, Opposing Force Tactics, page 4-2 and 4-3.

³ Matt M. Matthews, [“We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War,”](#) US Army Combined Arms Center Combat Studies Institute, 2008.

⁴ Matt M. Matthews, [“We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War,”](#) US Army Combined Arms Center Combat Studies Institute, 2008; [“Second Lebanon War 2006,”](#) Israpost, 12 July 2006.

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⁶ See: Matt M. Matthews, [“We Were Caught Unprepared: The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War,”](#) US Army Combined Arms Center Combat Studies Institute, 2008; Avi Kober, [“The Israel Defense Forces in the Second Lebanon War: Why the Poor Performance?”](#) The Journal of Strategic Studies, 5 June 2008; Scott C. Farquhar (ed.), [“Back to Basics: A Study of the Second Lebanon War and Operation CAST LEAD,”](#) Combat Studies Institute, May 2009.

⁷ Blanchard, Christopher, et al. [“Lebanon: The Israel-Hama-Hezbollah Conflict.”](#) CRS Report for Congress. 15 September 2006.

⁸ “Defense Intelligence Report: Lexicon of Hardened Structure Definitions and Terms,” Defense Intelligence Agency, April 2006.

⁹ Benjamin S. Lambeth, [“Air Operations in Israel’s War Against Hezbollah,”](#) RAND Corporation, 2001.

¹⁰ Benjamin S. Lambeth, [“Air Operations in Israel’s War Against Hezbollah,”](#) RAND Corporation, 2001.

¹¹ Benjamin S. Lambeth, [“Air Operations in Israel’s War Against Hezbollah,”](#) RAND Corporation, 2001.

¹² For more information on these systems, see [Volume I of the World Wide Equipment Guide](#) (WEG).

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- ¹³ Benjamin S. Lambeth, "[Air Operations in Israel's War Against Hezbollah](#)," RAND Corporation, 2001.
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- ¹⁸ Steven Erlanger and Richard A. Oppel, "[A Disciplined Hezbollah Surprises Israel With Its Training, Tactics, and Weapons](#)," The New York Times, 7 August 2006.
- ¹⁹ [TC 7-100.2: Opposing Force Tactics](#). TRADOC G2 TRISA-Threats CTID. December 2011.
- ²⁰ Tony Karon, "[Who Really Won the War?](#)" TIME, 15 August 2006.
- ²¹ Nicholas Blanford, "[A Rare Trip Through Hizbullah's Secret Tunnel Network](#)," The Christian Science Monitor, 11 May 2007.
- ²² A Human Rights Watch investigation revealed that Israel failed "to abide by a fundamental obligation of the laws of war: the duty to distinguish between military targets, which can be legitimately attacked, and civilians, who are not subject to attack." See: "[Why They Died](#)," Human Rights Watch, 6 September 2007.
- ²³ Joanna Paraszczuk, "[Iranians Help Hezbollah Build Tunnels in Lebanon](#)," The Jerusalem Post, 3 July 2012.
- ²⁴ Scott C. Farquhar (ed.), "[Back to Basics: A Study of the Second Lebanon War and Operation CAST LEAD](#)," Combat Studies Institute, May 2009.
- ²⁵ Jonathan Schanzer, "[An Edge in the Desert: A flood of new weapons—from Iran to Saudi Arabia—is dangerously changing the military dynamic in the Middle East](#)," Foreign Policy, 3 February 2014.