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Briefs

IAF Chief: Israel Would Go 'All-Out' in War With Lebanon

Israel would use all its strength from the start in any new war with Hezbollah, the chief of the Israeli air force said yesterday, sending a firm warning a decade after their last conflict.

At the annual Herzliya security conference, Maj. Gen. Amir Eshel said qualitative and quantitative improvements in the air force since the 2006 Lebanon War meant it could carry out in just two or three days the same number of bombings it mounted in those 34 days of fighting.

"If war breaks out in the north, we have to open with all our strength from the start," he said, pointing to the likelihood of international pressure for a quick ceasefire before Israel can achieve all its strategic goals.

Israeli politicians and generals have spoken often of an intention to hit hard in Lebanon if war breaks out, in an apparent bid to deter Hezbollah. Eshel said in 2014 that another conflict could see Israeli attacks 15 times more devastating for Lebanon than in 2006.

But at the conference, Eshel noted that "many elements busy achieving their goals" in Syria's civil war were interested in preventing any fresh hostilities in Lebanon, where Hezbollah has built up an arsenal of more than 100,000 rockets.

Since early in the six-year-old Syria war, Hezbollah's energies have been focused on propping up President Bashar Assad in alliance with Iran and Russia. Although Israel has kept to the sidelines of the war in Syria, Israeli aircraft have targeted suspected Iranian arms shipments to Hezbollah, operations complicated by Russian and U.S. air activity in the region.

"The skies of the Middle East are a lot more crowded than before, with lots of players," Eshel said, pointing to the need for the air force to operate "surgically" to avoid "mistakes."

Eshel cautioned residents in southern Lebanon, a Hezbollah stronghold, to leave their homes if a new conflict erupts, saying the Iranian-backed group uses civilian homes as "launching bases for missiles and rockets."