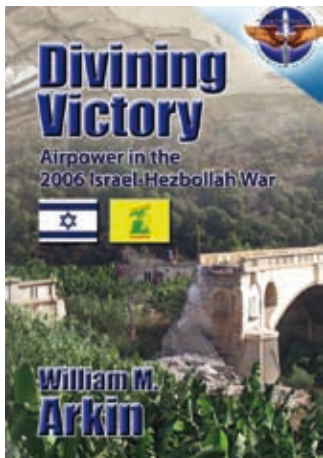


## Divining Victory: Air power in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War



By William M Arkin

Publisher: Air University Press, Maxwell

ISBN978-1-58566-168-8

Price \$30 (326 pages, paperback)

**Reviewed by Gp Capt Neville Parton**

The conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, played out in Lebanon during the summer of 2006, may well come to be seen as something of a watershed in future years; a relatively short and intense conflict between a technologically-focussed set of defence forces on the one hand, and a sub-state irregular force on the other, albeit one that had been well-equipped and trained by external agencies. What is certain is that potential protagonists in the arena of sub-state actors will have undoubtedly paid close attention to the outcome, and it therefore behoves those who might be involved

in activities against such opposition in the future to also consider what lessons might be drawn. In that regard, William Arkin's book has an extremely valuable role to play. It has certainly succeeded inasmuch as it is one of the few recent books on air power to rate a review – and a positive one at that – from the pages of the New York Times.

In terms of content this is very much a book of 2 halves; with the first part of the book containing background, description and analysis, whilst the latter part contains supporting information – and in significant quantities. The background to the conflict and examination of Hezbollah provide an excellent lead in to a neat campaign summary, and thence to consideration of the overall effects of the war, and a detailed examination of the damage actually caused in the Lebanon. The final three chapters then look at the link between targeting and effect and Israel's own understanding of the campaign, before considering what can be extracted in terms of conclusions regarding the use of air power in a 'terrorist' campaign. Appendices cover the IDF order of battle and main personalities, as well as a detailed chronology of the entire campaign, gazeteer of all ground targets struck in Lebanon and a detailed bibliography of sources. These elements alone will make it an invaluable starting point for any individual wishing to delve deeper into the conflict, and probably provide the most accurate overall summary of the campaign that is likely to be found outside of a classified intelligence report. What is more, it reflects the tremendous care that has been taken by the author to try and identify 'facts'

as far as is possible, via a considerable investment in technologically-driven detective work, and to then contrast these with the perceptions that either existed at the time or have persisted to this day.

Arkin is an interesting character, having been involved in both post-conflict analysis and reporting for a number of years, for a range of non-governmental organisations ranging from Greenpeace International to the United Nations, and with considerable experience of evaluating the effects of air power on the ground. Having been a fierce critic of air power in places such as Serbia and Afghanistan, as he himself admits it was a courageous move by the USAF to then invite him to produce a book predominantly looking at the air power aspects of the Lebanon conflict.

So, having considered the layout and author, what about the content? Well, it will not perhaps make comfortable reading for out and out exponents of air power, although for the more reflective reader it will probably provide a great deal of food for thought. Perhaps some of the most prescient observations have to do with the difference between the actual impact (no pun intended) of IDF operations on the ground in Lebanon, compared with the perceptions that have been presented by the worlds media, or indeed perpetuated by agencies such as the UN. Whilst some of these can be attributed to the very competent media/info ops campaign run by Hezbollah, much of the responsibility lies with the IDF. Here, despite careful military and legal analysis being undertaken to ensure that individual elements of

each target group were justified, the overall summary led to an inevitable conclusion that "...Israel also undertook an intentionally punishing and destructive air campaign against the people and government of Lebanon." In fact in one of the most vivid images of the book, Arkin says that "Arguing that Israel achieved what it set forth to achieve in the 2006 war, however, is a little like saying that the operation was successful but the patient died." Yet one of the clearest conclusions is that whilst air power did not provide a 'silver bullet', it did remain one of the most flexible tools for fighting Hezbollah – and that a land-led campaign might well have suffered even greater problems in the media, as well as much higher losses. The major fault – that of a failure at the grand strategic level, in terms of expecting the military to reach an end state which was quite simply unachievable, is clearly identified. The sub-text is that Israel in general, and the IDF in particular, failed in terms of the challenge to tell its air power story effectively, and that focus on the 'battle of the narratives' is one which needs to be picked up on.

This publication, in common with other Air University Press (AUP) titles, is available in a number of different ways – although all of them initially involve a visit to the AUP website (<http://aupress.au.af.mil/>). It can be purchased via the AUP direct if you prefer hardcopy for your bookshelf, or downloaded as a pdf document free of charge – so there really is no excuse for not reading it. It is also highly likely to feature on the 2008 CAS Reading List, so if you want to get a step ahead in your professional education – get hold of a copy now!

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