**"Success is measured by the quantity of new targets": This is how the IDF Bank in Gaza is built**

[**Yaniv Kubowitz**](https://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/writers/WRITER-1.681402)**, Haaretz 15/12/19**

"The IDF's perception is that success is being measured by the quantity of attack targets that are being produced, the number of new targets entering the bank," says to Haaretz, an Air Force man, named here A, on the military's target bank in the Gaza Strip. Since the attack on the a-Swarkeh family home in Deir al Balah and killing nine members of the family, A was exposed to the discourse surrounding that action. The IDF's claim that the target was "verified", that is, tested a few days before the attack itself, caused him, as well as many officers and soldiers in the Intelligence and the Air Force, to feel uncomfortable. "Usually there is no significant intelligence activity for targets that already exists, because it is more meaningful to create new targets, that is what you are told in the end."

These statements of A do not refer to a specific case, but to the culture to which the IDF is exposed. Similar statements are also heard by an officer named here B. Both of them participated in decision making processes about targets and their approval. They describe a dynamic within the teams responsible for these processes during combat rounds: the central part of the culture of improvisation in decision-making; the importance of quantity over quality, the way these measures are viewed for promotion purposes and the political pressures to create new targets, which results in attacking targets from non-operational considerations.

On paper, the two say, there is no problem in the way in which the process of selecting and approving the targets should take place. The problem is execution. The key people here are members of the target's design team, who are responsible for it from every aspect: its choice, "period" and the question of how to attack. "The team can have between five and 15 different factors," explains A.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

He said, "The head of the planning team will usually be a pilot, permanent or reserve, who is also obliged to take headquarter positions if he wants a promotion in the squadron or rank." The other members will usually include intelligence personnel, a performance researcher who will assess how well the plan was drafted and the consequences of the incidental damage as well as the representative of the military prosecutor responsible for various aspects of international law.

The first problem that arises, the two say, is the incentive. The team leader will eventually look at the amount of new goals he has been able to produce and not the ones he has approved. ""Targets duty" (in which re-targets are verified - YC) is considered a less prestigious task, as far as the pilots are concerned, it's always stuck at a bad time," says B. " Usually the intelligence representative starts talking and if he says that there is no new information about the target in the recent year, the discussion ends. Verifying a target can take a minute and can take an hour, depending on the intelligence and desire of the team to delve deeper into the issue. "

Over the past few years, B and A have had a great deal of discussion around goals, and have been exposed to the interests of participants in discussions. "You have to say that good people sit there, it's not corrupt people," says B, "But in the end it's people who are measured by the amount of goals and assaults, and they also want to go home on time. Everyone in the room realizes that if they explore deeply each target, they won't go out in the next two weeks. So in many cases it becomes a kind of automatic operation." He says," Everyone understands that a high number of targets will result in the senior command being satisfied and this always adds to the advancement of the design team commanders. It's not something corrupt that happens under the table, it's something that everyone understands even without having to talk about it directly. "

The problem, says B, does not amount to the time the team members have to invest, but also their rank and seniority in the army. Or in other words: seniority gaps and ranks. Often, he says, "in these teams sits a commander who is a major from the Air Force and opposite is a corporal or a sergeant of intelligence. These are young guys, very talented, but it's an army. At the end, the corporal sits in front of a pilot and tells him he's wrong or makes him stay in the office all night because he decided to dig deeper into the targets - that's a situation not every young soldier can do. "

In this context, A. adds that during a battel, an Air Force man wants to attack a particular target, the intelligence man who sits in front of him (and needs to examine, verify, and determine that it meets conditions), will not interfere with him. He is the senior. "There have been cases like this and none of them have any kind of doubt about the decision of a senior commander that he might be wrong," he said. "There is no thought or possibility to express a thought and certainly not to ask why the action should be done, and that is it."

**Benefits Equal Targets**

An aspect rooted early on, the two say, is the ultimate goal: to find targets. "When a young soldier arrives, this issue of sensitivity to the officers who must present results is most clearly conveyed to them even more in their overlap. This is the kind of information that is passed on as a legacy between the veteran and the new," says A. "It's made clear to him that it's a promotion and that people want to fly home early." Over time, the message goes on and on. "Air Force man wants to take out attack and intelligence man wants to sign another target", Adds A. "At the end of the day, the two people understand what the high ranks and politicians want and try not to fail each other."

A source of delay is further testing of targets instead of finding new ones. "There can also be 500 targets and going through them takes the time needed to create new targets," explains A. "Sometimes the team can impose a project to create new goals in a particular area or around a specific topic, and for its members, it becomes the central task." Sometimes it also brings side benefits."A team that brings new targets," he says, "can get all kinds of benefits like fun days, vacation, or being declared a successful team before everyone else."

The equation of the number of targets in relation to their quality has another side effect - the difficulty of choosing targets that hitting them will actually promote the fighting. "In [operation Solid Cliff](https://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/tags/TAG-1.2384410) , the operation lasted 51 days," says B. "The start was very intense and after three weeks we also ran out of targets." At this point, he said, targets such as open fields, sites that were already being attacked, roads, or tunnels whose shafts had been attacked at the beginning of the war came up. "There was an instruction to continue to produce attacks all the time," he says. "It was called it the creation of a consciousness of oppression, that in reality was making noise in Gaza."

Another problem related to the choice of targets, and more so in their scope, is the question of what is there in practice. When a target comes to be reconsidered by the design team, says A., they have no idea what is really there. "If it appears as an IAI warehouse then we do not know how much IAI is on the target," he explains. "There could be one grenade or 1,000 grenades or toilet papers. We have no way of knowing."

He said during a wave of assaults no one would launch a UAV to conduct a real-time ("contractual", operationally) test of any target - just to make sure that whatever was there was still there or if there was a change in it. Whether it's an observation post, training compound, or weapons warehouse. "There is no way to know what happened in real time," he says, "so they follow the target file."

A and B themselves did not take part in the incident in which the members of the a-Swarkeh family were killed, but they said such an event could occur when there was a desire to please the team, and when there is no high confidence in the target. "Everyone knows that in most cases, nothing happens - that's the perception - you are told to take the risk," says A. "But suddenly there is a case that an entire family is dead and everyone does not understand why. I have no idea if [Deir El Balah](https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.8130778) 's case is like this, but I have no doubt that such an event could fall into exactly the same" give and take "situations between planning and validation team members. Culture of improvisation. "

The person who is supposed to play a significant role in this kind of process is the representative of the military prosecutor's office. "They have a fixed saying in those sessions: the target can be attacked if it is proportionate," says A. "It is a flexible concept in the military." Sometimes, he says, a team commander who is most interested in targets will seek to stretch the boundary and risk involved in choosing the targets, so the expected casualty damage may result in more casualties among civilians.

The question of what the targets really are has additional implications, though unrelated to killing civilians. "Sometimes we hear about an assault on a training organization of one or another terrorist organization," says A. "People might think that this is a compound that looks like a Tze'alim base, with large, ranged buildings and built-in combat practice areas." But according to him, "Sometimes what is defined as a training complex is an area where the activists get there to run or exercise. An observation stand can be a stand that looks like a lifeguard or pit with sandbags around it. The purpose of the 'underground' can be parking under the house of an activist. Not every subterranean is a tunnel attack as you think, or as shown in the media. "

**Quality, lines to her character**

After operations (or escalation rounds), senior political and security officials rush to announce that "quality targets" have been attacked. Meaning for the general public: The other side suffered a severe blow. But A and B, are less impressed by this phrase. "Quality goals are an expression of the media and generals being interviewed," says B. "In practice, there are goals you know that attacking them can impair the other party's command and control ability or take away important capabilities." But that, he says, is only known after the attack. "We have often seen in the media that the IDF attacked quality targets, and we know it was containers," he said. Maybe the containers contained something that is worth an attack, but then Hammas would have not put it on the beach which is not the safest place. "

Also A has reservations regarding the term "quality targets". "Such a target can be a two-rocket warehouse or training compound," he explains. "There are targets that are considered such a strategic hit that will certainly affect the enemy's fighting, causing confusion. Mostly, they are targets of command and control. But to determine before attacking is almost meaningless. Only after the attack happens we can analyze its effect.

Recently, a new expression has entered the war jargon – "powerful targets". Seemingly a quality plus goal. In fact, says B, these are four-floors buildings and above. "In one of the last rounds, such a target was attacked, a communications building," he demonstrates. "You have to understand, this is not a CNN building. It's an apartment or half-floor with communications equipment that will be moved to another building the next day."

According to the two, the decline in the quality of targets was evident in the recent round of fighting in the Gaza Strip - [Operation](http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/.premium-1.8168854)[Black Belt](https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/.premium-1.8168854) - so the IDF was required to produce Islamic Jihad targets without damaging Hamas assets. No one has ever referred to this organization. " It is small, meager, does not have the capabilities of Hamas and is very prominent above ground. "Unlike Hamas, B says, when Jihad activists launch, they leave the post and move to another, not disappearing.

The objectives of the last operation are defined as "poor". "There are no big targets or ones that are complicated to attack," one of them explains. "There was nothing big and exciting."

In general, the two believe that the motive for the last round of escalation was political. "Having an event like this after less than 48 hours of combat conducted by the Air Force and the Southern Command as an exercise shows that someone had to present this event as an achievement," adds one, "to produce something much larger than it actually was."

As a general rule, political intervention at the Target Bank is not necessarily an exceptional event, says A. In recent years, he remembers an event in which the political echelon was conveyed, even demanding, "that now any reaction of the IDF, no matter which front, will be much more damaging than the other party's action," he recounts. Then a certain incident occurred. Some options for response came from the political echelon: much heavier targets are required. "The choice was unreasonable, since there are targets that you do not want to hit after every event, there are targets you keep for days of war, whose attack is supposed to change the face of the campaign. "A. adds." There are instances that a target attack may expose the intelligence the IDF has in a way that will lead the other party to restructuring and reorganize. "

In that case, he says, there was no one in the IDF who supported the decision of the political echelon. "You feel the frustration of all those who understand that due to a political decision and serving the status of one or the other politician requires you to have things that have no operational justification. In another case at that time, says A, there was again an exceptional demand from Jerusalem. "The significance of the targets that the political echelon wanted was a high likelihood of opening a war."

It's been a few years since those cases, but A and B claim that this has been the case for years. "Now [Naftali Bennett is](https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/.premium-1.8233760) taking office and he is also making statements of assaults with fatalities, Iranian targets, assassinations, every day something new," says A. "For professionals these are hard to hear. Everyone understands that the statements made by those politicians and their promises in interviews will be a choice for targets and may lead to unnecessary assault just so that a political party can come out of the media and say that it has done what was promised. The status of the operational consideration and the desired outcome is eroded - and becomes less relevant. "

The IDF spokesman responded that "the claims that quantity is prioritized over quality in the production process and the collection of targets in the IDF do not have any basis in reality, as do other claims presented in the article. The process of producing and approving the targets has been conducted in the IDF systematically and professionally for years. The process is conducted with holy angst by intelligence, air force, operations, international law and other IDF and security agencies.
"This process is reviewed, researched and updated routinely and as evidence - the quality of targets and their accuracy at each operational event in all sectors. When there are operational errors, the issue is explored and investigated in depth to generate relevant lessons and improvements."