

WHEN PRECISION IS NOT ENOUGH

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Advanced sensor and precision guidance technologies have changed dramatically the capability of NATO forces and other Western militaries to strike designated targets. Emphasis has been given to development of munitions that limit collateral damage. Yet, with all of these technological advances, other factors play an overriding role in influencing world opinion, and even in determining what constitutes winning a given conflict.

The 2006 conflict between Israel and Lebanon offer specific examples. In one instance there was irrefutable evidence that Hezbollah was launching missile towards Israel from the immediate vicinity of a specific building in Qana. The Israeli military responded, striking the build that than collapsed. While Israel reported they believed the building to be unoccupied, in fact, there were many people seeking shelter including a substantial number of children. As a result, the press portrayed Israel as the aggressor and at fault for destroying this legitimate target. This proved that to satisfy external sources, precision was insufficient and omniscience would have been necessary.

There were other instances in which Hezbollah used innocent civilians and even UN forces as cover for their attacks. Canadian soldiers were killed by counter-fire from Israeli guns. Before that attack that had complained about Hezbollah hugging their positions and to launch missiles.

Elsewhere in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) there have been situations in which attacks against “high value targets” have killed innocent civilians. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan have numerous tales of such strikes as terrorists commingle with innocent civilians.

While sensors and intelligence systems constantly improve, it is highly unlikely that the level of detail necessary to obtain perfect knowledge of battlefield conditions will be achieved. The role of the media continues to increase in shaping world opinion. Unfortunately, much of what is reported is either wrong or grossly distorted. Since neither self-correction of the media, nor omniscience is possible, it is therefore incumbent on the military to make an extra effort to limit collateral casualties. That effort can and should include rapid development of area effect non-lethal weapons.