

A Peek into the IAF's Target Gathering Unit

Defense-aerospace



The Israeli Air Force operates a range of aircraft for intelligence missions, including modified Gulfstream business jets outfitted with home-grown electronics provided by Elta, Rafale and Elbit. (Israeli AF file photo)

Four decades of operational activity: the IAF's Target Gathering & Marking Unit commemorated 40 years since its establishment last week. A peek into the unit that was a part of every IAF operation.

The audience was seated in order to commemorate 40 years of activity in the TGMU, when suddenly four of its members who returned from operational activity entered quietly. Beautifully demonstrating the nature of the unit, even on this day, when generations upon generations of servicemen and women congregated in order to discuss the past, activity doesn't stop for a moment. This is the essence of the unit: secret, operational and busy, in routine and in emergency.

"Intelligence is the beginning of operating aerial force in attack and defense. The high pace of operation, the necessary precision and focus require unique intelligence abilities in every layer of operational activity", said Brig. Gen. Tal Kelman, Chief of Air Staff. "The evolution of preliminary intelligence and threat intelligence and later SIGINT which is based on professional processing abilities, has given the IAF new dimensions of action, unprecedented lethality, the ability to operate in a threat saturated environment and placed us in the spearhead of Air Forces in the world".

The TGMU is composed of IAF and Military Intelligence Directorate personnel. It was established in February 1977 as a part of the consequences of the 1973 "Yom Kippur" War, when the need in the IAF for a unit able to independently create aerial intelligence, arose. The unit mostly provides intelligence and security and in its books you could find almost every IAF operation that you have heard of and a lot that you haven't.

"Only in partnership we will be victorious"

The world of intelligence is shrouded by such a cloak of secrecy, that sometimes the unit's personnel aren't aware of the full picture of the activity they are participating in. "Sometimes it is better not to know everything", agreed those who sat in the room. For example, the unit had an active part in 1981 Operation "Opera", in which IAF aircraft destroyed the Iraqi Nuclear Reactor, but didn't know the meaning of the sortie until it was announced by the Prime Minister.

The uncertainty and challenge do not lessen the feelings of mission and pride that the unit's personnel share. "About a year ago, I met some of the unit's former commanders. The meeting instilled something in me and I understood that I have to bring the different generations together", shared Lt.Col. Nir, Commander of the TGMU. "In the preparations for this evening, I came upon veterans of the unit for whom the abbreviation TGMU creates excitement and pride. I was exposed to stories that are the core of the IAF and IDF's operational history, stories shared only between unit personnel. It was clear to me that these are the legacy and character that I must preserve in the next generations".

A recurrent pattern which was noticeable among every speaker, was their thanks to the people who made up the unit in the past and who serve in it in the present, who side by side are a significant part of the campaign and bring victory. "Throughout the years, the cooperation with the Intelligence Directorate grew and from independent ability we are on the verge of full combined abilities and in a unique structure", emphasized Brig. Gen. Kelman. "This is a tiding which holds great potential for the future. Only in partnership, we will be victorious".