

Lessons from the Bekaa Valley - an Indian's assessment

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Introduction

The tale of the air war over the Bekaa Valley has only improved with time and telling. It was definitely a spectacular operation but various slanted lessons have been read of the operation, though the Israelis themselves have often said that its lessons cannot be generalised.

This assessment is based on a selection of typical analyses done by various agencies. I have based as my source official analyses by Col. Dubrov writing in the *Aviatsiya* and *Kosmonautica* on the lessons of the war and a commentary on the same by Dr. Benjamin Lambeth writing for RAND. Both these journals are “Government” and being Government has the merit of being true though, again being Government, not the whole truth. A factor none of the reports mention was the contribution of the terrain of the Bekaa Valley. The terrain of the Bekaa Valley was significant to the final results and makes the operation “unique” rather than “general”. This has been discussed.

Military reports often have a strong “marketing” angle to them. The more obvious biases were filtered out. It then appears that at the Bekaa Valley rather than “the latest technology” (i.e. unaffordable) warplanes winning the war it was the traditional qualities- diligence, carefulness, training

and planning which the Israelis displayed over a sustained period- a decade to be precise- paid rich dividends whilst dogged courage –which the Syrians displayed in abundance- did not get the Syrians anywhere. It should not be taken to mean that if the Syrians had the same qualities of careful planning as the Israelis the loss ratio would have been reversed but certainly the Syrians could have given the Israelis – who are poorly placed to take casualties- quite a bad fright. With equally careful planning and some supplementary low-cost upgrades on the part of the Syrians the Israelis could have been dissuaded from undertaking the operation at all which is the ultimate achievement of any Armed Force. As an aspirant but pacific major power with the usual budget constraints the major lesson for us is Bekaa Valley as a case study of how more economical alternatives are contrived and made available to us. Bekaa Valley needs an unbiased but intensive study.

Various claims and predictions have been made about the conflict from the Israelis having invented a secret weapon to the fact that the Bekaa Valley triggered the collapse of the Soviet Union to even that Bekaa Valley is a proof that third (read x) generation fighters cannot survive against fourth (read x+1) generation aircraft.

This view needs reasoned debate in India because the assumption is less true than is generally supposed to be and we face the similar problem with China with its larger Industrial base.

For India the tactical lessons of the Bekaa Valley are not important. The IAF is more than up to that job. The focus is on the philosophy. The Israelis had numerical superiority both overall and locally. Ignoring numbers to concentrate on quality would be as sure a way to defeat *as to rely solely on numbers*. One of the important lessons of the Bekaa Valley- completely avoided by the “marketeers” of sophistication is the importance of adequate numbers of adequate rather than necessarily top end warplanes.

How to achieve this balance between sophistication and numbers should occupy our experts because the scenario is India specific and somewhat different from “world standards”. No one- certainly not the vendors- will tell you what the specifications really should be. If you enjoyed the first Kung Fu Panda movie you will remember that the secret of the Magic Scroll was that there was no secret and no one will teach you any which way- you have to “figger” out the secret of the Wu Xi hold yourself!



SA-6's (Images Commons/Wikipedia)

