



DIGITAL BATTLESPACE 

## Inside Israel's secretive intelligence unit

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**Instant intelligence is critical to Israel's security, allowing the military or security forces to make swift decisions when it comes to preventing an attack or targeting a terrorist cell.**

*Shephard* recently visited one secretive Israeli intelligence unit, part of the Israeli Air Force, that provides this instant intelligence by working around the clock and constantly monitoring multiple intelligence streams.

The Geospatial Visual Intelligence Unit, also known as Unit 121, uses a vast array of tools - including images received via aircraft, satellites and other means - to extract every ounce of information in the constant effort to detect potential threats.

'Today we are faced with many threats,' the Commander of Unit 121 told *Shephard*. 'We receive information around the clock every minute of the day and we need to work very fast in order to deal with them as they come up at a moment's notice.'

He emphasised that the situation in the Middle East changes sometimes hourly and his goal is to try his utmost to provide answers immediately to his superiors about events that seem imminent.

'Some things are seen and understood clearly, but sometimes I can see "a footprint in the sand" and even though it's not tangible I feel it is important to relay to the pilot or UAV operator that I have a gut feeling that something needs to be watched or checked.'

The big change in the operational capabilities, he explained, is the speed of obtaining information.

'Today we have a lot of information. All I need is 30 seconds on the internet to receive all the pictures and then to decide how to deal with all this information and what the priorities are.'

'What is critical is to spot the one indication among the multitude of images that could provide the clue to the enemy's intentions and to build an intelligence picture.'

He said that as an operational unit logistics are vital, as well as technical support, which includes interpreting aerial photographs, creating maps and technological aids. The commander added that the technology available to them enables them to perform many tasks automatically.

The unit possesses a wide variety of resources to deal with the masses of information coming in, including an imagery analyst, a photo lab, and a printing plant.

The air force is in constant readiness to face changing threats.

'We train all the time and try to be one step ahead by understanding sudden changes, and to be flexible. The ability to notice the changes is critical [and] headquarters is constantly testing our ability to see changes. After each exercise we hold a post-mortem to understand where improvements can be made for the next exercise.'

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