

24 December 2025

## **Speech of the Chief of the General Staff, LTG Eyal Zamir**

The President of Israel, Mr. Isaac Herzog, and his wife,

The Prime Minister, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, and his wife,

The Minister of Defense, Mr. Israel Katz,

The Commander of the Israeli Air Force, MG Tomer Bar,

Mayors, heads of councils, and kibbutz communities,

Cadets,

Dear commanders,

Dear families,

And most important of all, graduates of the 191st Pilot Course,

On the night between the twelfth and thirteenth of June, I presented to the Government of Israel's cabinet the final plan for the strike in Iran. It was a dramatic meeting. The Cabinet Secretary recited a prayer for the safety of IDF soldiers. The tension was palpable, and there was a feeling in the air of the crowded room that something historic was about to happen. Hands were raised, and the operation was approved. We traveled quickly from Jerusalem to the IDF Headquarters, at top speed, straight to the command bunker. There, at this historic moment in time, I found a group of devoted officers operating with composure and professionalism, issuing orders to dozens of pilots circling in the air like eagles in the skies of the Middle East, waiting for their final order. At the last moment, targets shifted. The skilled intelligence teams continuously updated the situational picture, and the pilots in the air swiftly completed new missions. Tomer and I looked at one another; the authorization was given. At 02:55, dozens of strikes hit their targets with great precision. Operation "Rising Lion"

set out on its way. And all that followed from that point on - with refueling aircraft, intelligence, helicopters on standby for evacuation and strikes, special forces and ground crews - will be told at length in the history books. But I will tell you the bottom line: the Israeli Air Force, the long-range strategic arm of the State of Israel, was at its very best.

Dear cadets, a long and arduous journey is reaching the finish line at this very moment. Three years of training in one of the most complex and demanding tracks in the IDF will be sealed when the wings are pinned to your uniforms. And from that moment onward, the next operational mission - and with it the great responsibility of removing existential threats to Israel and ensuring the continued existence of the Jewish state - will be yours.

Over the past year, I met Israeli Air Force personnel in hardened aircraft shelters, in briefing rooms, and in the command center. But one moment, from the weeks preceding Operation "Rising Lion", is etched in my memory in particular. We set out on the mission knowing that the layers of defense were complex and that many unknowns lay ahead, and that a safe return was not guaranteed. Yet in the briefing room, not far from here, I received an unforgettable lesson in the strength of our people. "You are aware of the risk. Some aircraft will be shot down and some of you will not return", I told them. "We are ready for the mission. You can rely on us!" all the pilots replied. I knew that with that spirit, with the pilots in the air and the troops operating on the ground in Gaza and Lebanon, we could defeat any threat.

Since the failure of October 7th, and alongside the Ground Forces, the Israeli Air Force has been operating with unprecedented precision and scope, in arenas both nearby and distant - and has changed the security reality in the Middle East.

Following the great rupture, the Israeli Air Force and the entire IDF are conducting inquiries, reviewing ourselves. Systemic lessons learned and their implementation in the field are a fundamental and existential matter. We have no other choice: we will learn from the failure, but we will not sink into it.

We in the IDF, in the Israeli Air Force and in the other formations, are implementing the lessons together and moving in one direction - "forward"; we are adapting while operating — and moving from failure to victory. IDF soldiers and commanders, even during these times, know that the security of the State of Israel is not guaranteed. Alongside threats that have been removed, new threats are emerging, and after operations have concluded, new preparations are carried out. The message is clear: "The Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps." In response to any attempt to harm us, we will act according to the principle, "If someone comes to kill you, rise early and eliminate him", and we will strike the enemy. We will act decisively to remove any threat against us.

Dear families, many wish for it yet few are privileged enough to reach this moment. You are partners in their achievement - in every takeoff and landing, in every sleepless night, and in every moment of pressure and rising above in this demanding course. On your day of celebration, we salute not only the new graduates, but also you, the families - the steadfast home front, the stable ground, and the home from which they draw the values of the call of duty, excellence, and spirit that give the strength to take flight.

Tomer, I wish to express my deep appreciation to you and to the Israeli Air Force commanders - the base and squadron commanders, the career and reserve personnel, and the technical teams on the ground, without whom no aircraft could take off safely.

You navigated and demonstrated leadership in the longest and most complex war in our history, and you continue to lead the Israeli Air Force to impressive and unprecedented achievements.

From here, I wish to send my congratulations to the incoming Commander of the Israeli Air Force, BG Omer Tishler. You grew from this parade ground and advanced to the most operational and strategic roles in the Israeli Air Force and influenced the shaping of the most difficult moments faced by the IDF throughout your years of service.

I am confident that you will know how to lead the Israeli Air Force in the face of the challenges that still await us in the future.

Commanders and dear course staff, throughout this course you stood before a demanding and dual challenge. With one hand you led complex operational missions in enemy skies at the height of war, and with the other you continued to shape, educate, and train the future generation of the Israeli Air Force to uncompromising standards.

Your ability to command, educate, and train under fire is a model of Israeli leadership at its finest.

We carry with us the memory of the fallen, heroes of the war, whose legacy is the compass that shows us the way.

We salute the injured, who carry in their bodies and souls the scars of the mission, and we are committed to supporting them in the prolonged struggle of rehabilitation and return to everyday life.

The mission will not be complete until SFC Ran Gvili is also returned to rest in Israel.

Graduates of the 191st Pilot Course, soar upward to the skies and return safely to your bases - for you possess great strength; within you are wings of spirit, wings of the mighty eagles. Demand them, and they will find you .

Go forth and succeed!