

Foreword

Some books begin as warnings. Very few survive long enough to become road maps. This book does both.

Before October 7, General Hazoot argued that the Israel Defense Forces were drifting toward a dangerous imbalance. He warned that technology, standoff firepower, and intelligence dominance were being treated not as enablers of ground combat, but as substitutes for it. He cautioned that the IDF's Ground Forces, the decisive arm in Israel's wars of survival, were suffering from generational neglect, doctrinal erosion, and cultural assumptions that no longer matched the reality of modern war. Those warnings were uncomfortable. They challenged deeply held beliefs about casualties, control, and the promise of precision. They were largely ignored.

Then the war came.

What makes this book exceptional is not that its author predicted failure. Many do. What makes it rare is that Hazoot stayed to do the hardest work after failure occurred. He did not retreat into explanation or excuse. He built a system to learn in real time, under fire, and now offers something far more valuable than hindsight: a coherent manifesto of cause and effect, grounded in combat experience, institutional memory, and military theory.

This book could only have been written by someone with Hazoot's unique vantage point. During the war, he served as the Chief Learning Officer for the IDF Ground Forces. That role placed him at the nerve center of adaptation. He interviewed units before they entered Gaza and immediately after they exited combat. He collected lessons from brigades still fighting and transmitted them laterally to formations yet to deploy. He taught commanders what others had learned, often at the cost of blood, so that those lessons would not have to be relearned. He did this across Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, not as an academic exercise, but as a matter of operational survival.

This is not theory written at a distance. It is theory forged in friction.

Hazoot reminds me of Carl von Clausewitz in the way that matters most. Clausewitz did not write *On War* from victory. He wrote after defeat, after watching his army collapse under false assumptions, and after recognizing that failure, if properly studied, could become the foundation for renewal. Clausewitz understood that war punishes intellectual complacency and rewards those who confront reality without illusion. Hazoot writes from the same tradition. His analysis is unsparing precisely because he believes institutions can recover.

Democracies rarely reform their militaries absent shock. History is unambiguous on this point. In the United States, the Goldwater-Nichols reforms followed the trauma of Vietnam. In Israel, the IDF's most consequential transformation came only after the shock of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In France, defeat at the end of the Napoleonic Wars stripped away the illusion that brilliance and offensive spirit alone could sustain a nation at war, forcing a painful shift from heroic success to institutional endurance. Major military change is politically, culturally, and bureaucratically impossible until disaster makes denial untenable and forces consensus.

October 7 was such a moment for Israel.

Hazoot argues persuasively that the disaster was not inevitable. He lays out a clear chain of causality that predates the attack. Central to his thesis is the false dichotomy between a high-tech army and the so-called “cavalry,” the ground forces that must close with and destroy the enemy, maneuver under fire, seize and hold terrain, and impose political outcomes. He shows how Israeli society, like many advanced democracies, came to believe that technology could offset risk, that precision could replace presence, and that wars could be managed from a distance. These beliefs, reinforced by strategic narratives and institutional incentives, quietly deprioritized the very forces Israel ultimately depends upon in war.

This is not an argument against airpower, cyber, intelligence, or technological dominance. Hazoot is explicit that these capabilities are essential. His argument is that they are insufficient on their own. A military that excels in cyber and precision strike but underinvests in ground maneuver and reserves builds a hollow form of superiority. The IDF did not lack technology on October 7. It lacked prepared forces positioned, trained, and empowered to fight immediately and decisively on the ground.

The contrast is stark. Parts of the IDF did adapt. The Air Force, intelligence community, and select high-end units absorbed lessons, modernized doctrine, and preserved rigorous readiness standards. The Ground Forces, by contrast, were subjected to uneven investment, diluted training, and faulty assumptions about the character of future war. Night operations atrophied. Tunnel maneuver preparation lagged. Mission command eroded under centralized control. Reserve formations, once the backbone of Israeli deterrence, were treated as a strategic insurance policy rather than an operational necessity.

Hazoot’s central claim is not that the IDF forgot how to fight, but that it forgot how to prioritize. He demonstrates how cultural preferences, organizational incentives, and societal expectations combined to undervalue the forces that must ultimately do the hardest work in war. Technology was expected to minimize human cost. Borders were expected to substitute for maneuver. Deterrence was expected to substitute for readiness. War refused to cooperate.

The power of this book lies in its refusal to stop at diagnosis. Hazoot does not simply catalog failure. He shows how failure, when approached honestly, can become a catalyst for strength. The reforms he proposes are not cosmetic. They are demanding, disruptive, and, for any democracy, politically difficult. They require restoring primacy to ground maneuver, rebuilding professional mastery at the small-unit level, re-embracing mission command, reinvesting in reserves, and accepting that readiness for war is costly, uncomfortable, and unavoidable.

This is why the final section of the book matters so deeply. Hazoot is not writing an autopsy. He is offering a road map. He argues that Israel now stands at a familiar crossroads in military history: the choice between explaining away failure or transforming because of it. One path leads to temporary reassurance and eventual repetition. The other leads to renewal.

Clausewitz warned that the most dangerous thing in war is not ignorance, but false certainty. Hazoot has stripped away that certainty and replaced it with something far more useful: clarity.

He shows that learning faster than the enemy is not a slogan but a system, that ground forces are not relics but decisive instruments, and that a nation willing to confront its own mistakes can emerge stronger than before.

This book began as a warning. It now stands as a guide for rebuilding what has been broken. Israel, and any military facing the realities of twenty-first-century war, would do well to study it carefully.

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