

How Israel's Army Sowed the Seeds of Its October 7 Disaster

Brig. Gen. (res.) Guy Hazoot's new book highlights the hubris and complacency that enabled Hamas on October 7. Will the same shortcomings hamstring Israel in a wider war with Hezbollah or Iran?

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The most jarring document about the army's failures that led to Hamas' October 7 onslaught isn't classified at all. In fact, it's now out at Israelis' neighborhood bookstore.

Brig. Gen. (res.) Guy Hazoot, a former division commander at the Southern Command, has written the Hebrew-language book "The High-Tech Army and the Cavalry Army: How Israel Forsook the Ground Forces." This work was scheduled to come out in October but got delayed for obvious reasons and now has an epilogue that almost wrote itself. It's clear that if the political and military leaders had heeded the book's warnings, the scale of the disaster might have been lower.

The book opens with a meeting of the Israel Defense Forces' senior operations forum in 2018; the author took part. The IDF chief of staff at the time, [Gadi Eisenkot](#), revealed to the commanders some of the secrets of the "war between the wars" in which Military Intelligence, the air force and the Operations Directorate had been intensively involved since the beginning of the decade.

"The approach and the operations that were presented reflected an advanced, sophisticated army at its finest – daring, wily, innovative, technology-rich and striving for contact [with the enemy]," Hazoot writes.

But ground-forces officers, a majority at the meeting, were bemused. In the IDF, they realized, "two armies had developed," and the one they belonged to "was bland, irrelevant and dealt mainly with grinding, routine security tasks. The high-tech army and the cavalry army."

In the war between the wars over three decades, Israel invested vast sums in the intelligence community, the air force and technology, and cut back on the ground forces. The changes stemmed in part from Israeli society's decreasing tolerance for casualties. A ground operation, whether in wars or between them, is a dangerous adventure that will always exact a high price.

The result was a vicious circle. The land units, especially those made up of reservists, received less training, so the security cabinet and the General Staff had less confidence in them. And young, highly talented soldiers started to look for their futures in other corps, so the commanders' skill level suffered.

The book's original manuscript concluded with the fighting with Gaza in May 2021 and the "Metro" episode – the failed airstrikes on Hamas' underground network of command posts. The IDF declared the operation a great success. A few journalists crowed about a mass killing of terrorists and a crushing blow against Hamas. Actually, the opposite happened.

The plan, which had been prepared meticulously for years and was supposed to be decisive, was let loose without justification. The top brass were loath to send in a ground force for a limited operation, one where hundreds of terrorists would seek shelter

underground and then be hit in a high-precision airstrike. Without the ground maneuver, Hamas didn't fall for the deception and its fighters stayed where they were. Only a few terrorists were killed, and Israel wasted one of its strategic cards.

Hazoot is unsparing in his criticism of his former superiors. In his view, the episode was the epitome of the IDF's faults in recent decades: fear of sending in the ground forces and risking losses or outright failure, groupthink, and the painting of every development in rosy hues. Hazoot hadn't realized it, but his words were very prophetic.

A different kind of terror

At the start of the war, Hazoot was appointed chief of the ground-forces unit tasked with learning lessons from recent failures. His allegations provide a manual on the IDF's ailments, the ground forces' especially. Unusually for IDF officers, he writes very well. It's clear that, unlike most of his colleagues, he has read the military literature on the bookshelf.

But his epilogue leaves the most powerful impression, because this is basically the first book or article on the failures of October 7 by an army officer still on the job.

It's not an official report, and the scope is limited: the failures of the ground forces. But Hazoot's wealth of experience, including his stints during the war at the Ground Forces Command and at the Southern Command, provide him with a crucial vantage point.

A few months earlier, he returned from a term as military attaché in Singapore and retired from the army. In the summer of 2023 he joined a civilian research group that advised the IDF on crafting a response to the growing threat posed by Hezbollah's elite Radwan Force. It had deployed near the border in south Lebanon without Israel doing anything about it.

The more research Hazoot did, the more he worried. He discovered that Hezbollah had made a breakthrough, and the army didn't have an appropriate response.

Terrified, Hazoot spoke with four of his former subordinates: three brigade commanders and Brig. Gen. Itzik Cohen, who that summer was appointed head of the 162nd Division. Hazoot's message to each of the four was identical: The hardest war we've ever experienced will soon break out. Drop everything and focus all your efforts on preparing your units for the challenge.

He met with Cohen, his neighbor on Kibbutz Negba in the south, in synagogue on Yom Kippur eve, including at the opening Kol Nidrei prayer. "During the whole prayer I bugged him about the war that was going to erupt, and about what I recommended he should do as a division commander," Hazoot writes.

For three years Hazoot was preoccupied with the preparedness of the ground forces. He did research and wrote his book, and he saw how Israel's enemies viewed the polarization of Israeli society during the Netanyahu government's attempt to weaken the judiciary. This "shook me and gave me no rest," he writes. "That's why I've been feeling a sense of failure since the war – for not being vigorous enough in publishing this book and sounding a warning ahead of the disaster."

He met with two of the three brigade commanders in the first days of the war. They asked him how he had known. He never got a chance to meet again with the third brigade commander, Col. Roi Levy, who returned to combat service even though he had been seriously wounded. Levy was killed on October 7 in the battle at Kibbutz Re'im.

Like his colleagues in the army, Hazoot worried most about the north before the war. In a meeting with the division commander on the Lebanese border, he was appalled at the situation

presented to him. He asked the general in charge how he could sleep at night.

Hazoot offered to join the team that would present the disturbing picture in the north to [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu](#). The meeting that would form the team took place on October 6. That's as far as they got.

Hazoot is brief about the intelligence failure that preceded the war. He writes about V., the noncommissioned officer from Unit 8200, an elite intelligence outfit, who warned about Hamas' training efforts.

I learned a detail I hadn't known. V. opened a group chat at Military Intelligence, but Lt. Col. A., the Gaza Division's intelligence officer who didn't heed her warnings, described what V. documented across the border as maneuvers done merely to create an impression.

In retrospect, Hazoot finds similarities with the Israeli mindset vis-à-vis Egypt and Syria in the run-up to [the Yom Kippur War](#). "Arrogance, scorn, an 'It will be all right' approach," he writes.

"An army is training incessantly and is positioned on the border, our thinned-out forces are relying on a barrier ... and the intelligence people see everything with their eyes but are prisoners of the conception that the other side doesn't want a war."

The war against Hamas, Hazoot writes, "started with a crushing Israeli defeat. For hours, a foreign army captured an entire territory and vanquished the military force that defended it. Hundreds of Israelis were murdered, tortured, raped, [abducted](#). The residents of the communities across from Gaza became refugees in their own country and were joined by the residents of the Galilee after Hezbollah managed to create a security zone in our territory. ... [The iron wall](#) collapsed and needs to be rebuilt."

How did Hamas vanquish an IDF division and capture the western Negev? Israel didn't recognize the threat of an invasion by the terrorist armies of Hamas and Hezbollah, and the return of a multifront war 50 years after the 1973 war.

The Radwan and Nukhba forces were poised to attack in the north and south respectively and capture territory, but "the IDF did not deploy for this and Israel did not launch a preemptive strike to remove the threat." Instead, it became "addicted to quiet."

"In the past two decades a reverse process occurred. After their failures, the terrorist armies accelerated the building-up of their forces, but the IDF reduced its fitness and preparedness on land. After the enemy realized that Israel had been deterred and was forgoing raids and ground offensives during the rounds of fighting, they forged a new capability: an offensive into Israel.

"As the IDF ethos, which was based on initiative, offense, striving for contact, boldness and wiliness, was ground into the dust, our enemies adopted it. In a cold military analysis, Hamas' attack plan revealed brilliant military thought, a creative plan of deception, initiative, offense, boldness and striving for contact."

So for two decades the IDF eschewed a significant raid into Gaza – at a price. "When an army doesn't make the other side go on the defensive, at a certain stage the enemy will shift to offensive thinking."

According to Hazoot, Israel and its leaders fell asleep on their watch. For the most part, the rounds of fighting in Gaza "were failed deterrence operations. Hamas realized that it was not facing a concrete threat. Every round let Hamas learn the IDF's capabilities and better deploy for the big war.

"Israel deceived itself in three rounds of fighting in which it did not attack Hamas and took pride in victories over Islamic Jihad.

... The very fact that we let two terrorist armies deploy on the border, armed and well-equipped, with the ability to move from routine to an emergency footing and launch an onslaught in less than half a day is the greatest failure of October 7."

Hamas embarked on a surprise attack "against four weakened IDF battalions, despite its military inferiority vis-à-vis Israel, without tanks and planes, with 3,000 terrorists moving on motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles."

Hazoot adds: " Hamas managed to vanquish an IDF division that was on defense. It managed to offset all the advantages of the strongest army in the Middle East through a combination of exploiting Israeli intelligence's blindness, timing the attack on a Jewish holiday ... and neutralizing the division's command and control, which prevented an efficient mobilization of forces, and of the air force.

"But more than anything, Hamas' attack plan was based on the fact that the IDF's conception of defense on the Gaza border was a failure foretold."

Hazoot identifies the root of the failure: Israel gradually stopped enforcing the security perimeter – the narrow strip west of the border fence – after Hamas' "marches of return" there in 2018.

Also, on the Israeli side, after the 2005 Gaza pullout, the IDF set up makeshift military bases, but they were positioned without any tactical thought. All the commanders of the Gaza Division tried to relocate [the Nahal Oz base](#).

It wasn't a real military outpost, because the area was ruled by firing from Gaza City's Shujaiyeh neighborhood across the way. "And it suffered from every possible weakness that could lead to its capture and destruction by the enemy; for example, [the female spotters](#)." Hazoot asks why these soldiers, who were not

combat-fit, were deployed at "the IDF's most forward and threatened base." Well, we know how that ended.

In the months before the war, Israel got two wake-up calls about its lax defense. A Hezbollah terrorist penetrated from Lebanon and set off a powerful explosive at [Megiddo Junction](#) well inland, seriously wounding an Israeli civilian. And an Egyptian policeman crossed into Israel, killing three soldiers near the border. Thorough conclusions might have changed the culture on the borders, but the army gave this a miss.

"If the defense conception collapses in two sectors in the face of one terrorist, how are we to cope with thousands of terrorists accompanied by artillery fire in a surprise attack across the entire sector?" Hazoot asks.

Hamas' plan for vanquishing the Gaza Division combined three approaches. "The first was copied from Hezbollah: an aboveground invasion across an entire sector by a fit commando division at short notice. The second was taken from Sinai: [ISIS raids on the Egyptian army](#), which were characterized by rapid mobility based on pickup trucks and motorcycles, with the aid of firepower. The third intertwined elements of the war in Ukraine: attack drones in the opening blow."

As Hazoot puts it, "These approaches were welded into one operational concept. Precisely and disturbingly, Hamas analyzed all the IDF's defensive shortcomings. Its ability to read the IDF like an open book derives from neglect by the army and society."

Hamas drew on the workers from Gaza who were employed in Israeli communities near the Gaza border, but also on valuable information gleaned from soldiers' messages on social media. "Anyone who wanted to know anything about the IDF didn't need cyber operations or sophisticated spies. They just needed to collect information from open sources," Hazoot writes.

Hamas rendered itself "immune from the intelligence monster with the best reputation on the planet," he adds, though he notes that Israel still managed to collect quality intelligence.

"The proof is that the IDF had the attack plan a year before it was implemented. Still, the IDF didn't know that Hamas was ready and intended to execute it. Surprise was a basic condition. The intelligence community became addicted to a certain type of intelligence, without realizing that Hamas realized this and therefore created compartmentalization and secrecy."

Hazoot writes: "On Friday, less than 24 hours before zero hour, the blast wave began. In the military wing, the operatives along the chain of command were ordered to get to staging areas in mosques for briefings and to prepare their equipment. At 0500 hours the forces were ready at the jumping-off points for zero hour, which was delayed from 0600 hours to 0630.

"Under a barrage of lethal fire across the sector, 27 squads moved toward the fence and ... within 12 minutes overcame the barrier that the IDF thought was impassable." Hamas men on gliders and teams operating armed drones destroyed Israel's means of collecting intelligence and blew up fences in Israeli communities.

The first wave targeted army bases and their headquarters. The troops were pinned down, while Hamas sent hundreds of terrorists into the local communities and planned to send some deep into Israel.

Meanwhile, "Hamas forces raided 37 of the division's communications facilities. Their destruction blinded and deafened the division and disabled its command capabilities. The division's command posts and brigades could not fulfill their mission. No one controlled or commanded the combat sector, which became an arena of hundreds of face-to-face battles, with the enemy enjoying an advantage in both numbers and lethality.

"The bases turned out to be death traps. They did not have lethal firepower on the ground, and at the start of the fighting, not from the air, either. When the first aircraft arrived, there was no one to direct their fire, and when [the soldiers] cried out for help there was no reserve force to assist them. Like the residents of the civilian communities, they had to fight alone for their lives."

The Gaza Division's thinned-out defense, without reserves deep in the rear, didn't seem to have a chance. But Hazoot believes that a division more fit and better prepared "would have absorbed the whole might of Hamas' attack, contained it at a terrible price of soldiers, and would not at any stage have collapsed. And the civilians in the sector would not have paid the price of the collapse."

As he puts it, "Viewing dozens of video clips, I was not impressed by the quality of the Nukhba fighters. In encounters with IDF soldiers, the Israelis had the upper hand. Where Hamas fighters were victorious, our troops' ammunition simply ran out and they were at a significant numerical disadvantage. A division that prepared properly for a scenario like this, along with a meticulously upheld operational culture, would have reduced the damage.

"Unfortunately, the Gaza Division prepared based on the enemy's intentions, not its capabilities. Hamas grasped that the division it faced was not prepared and was on low alert."

On the Gaza border, Hazoot writes, all the ailments he tried to warn about played out. "Substandard professional and operational culture that is contemptuous of combat doctrine, commanders who are not in control or ignore canonical aspects of military history, an investigative culture that does not sanctify improvement and the learning of lessons, the commanders' lack of courage to speak their minds and the lack

of one 'bandit' commander who would have freed the system from its fixation on the 'concept.'

Ultimately, "the ground forces did not succeed in their only task: defending the residents of the communities near Gaza. Years of static defense and bland missions without any initiative led to the loss of sharpness and vigilance. The culture of preparedness that was once sacrosanct in the IDF was ground to dust."

According to Hazoot, "The complacent forces relied on a false consciousness of obstacles, because IDF commanders didn't learn from history. People have always found solutions for obstacles that other people built. It happened to the French in World War II when the Maginot Line was bypassed through the forests of the Ardennes, it happened to the Israelis in the Yom Kippur War when the Bar-Lev Line collapsed. Of which it's said: Even if we didn't learn from the experience of others, why didn't we learn from our own experience?"

But not only the "cavalry army" was exposed in its weakness on October 7.

"What value do hundreds of war-between-the-wars operations by the high-tech army hundreds of kilometers from Israel's border have if we can't contain a gang of terrorists one meter from the fence? In recent years, Israel invested 200 billion shekels [\$53 billion] in the high-tech army's luxury car, Unit 8200, which was supposed to provide a warning and failed to discover the timing of a coordinated attack by thousands of people meters from the border.

"Even the Shin Bet [security service], always an organization that used agents, abandoned that field and switched to cyber: 1,500 terrorists [Nukhba fighters, in the first wave of the incursion] raided the communities, and the Shin Bet didn't have one spy among them."

Dado or Dayan

At the end of his book, Hazoot suggests that the correction began when the government stopped worrying about the army's shortcomings and launched the ground offensive. That decision was preceded by stormy arguments, some of which Hazoot took part in. He recounts an argument between Brig. Gen. (res.) Moshe "Chico" Tamir, who crafted the plan for the ground offensive, and [Defense Minister Yoav Gallant](#).

"Tamir joined the visit and simply screamed at the minister. 'Decide who you prefer to be: Dado [David Elazar, IDF chief of staff in the Yom Kippur War] or [Moshe] Dayan [defense minister at the time]. Be Dado and free Israel from the deepest pit it has ever entered. Start to prepare the ground forces and give them one order: Get to Shati and Shifa [a refugee camp and a hospital in west Gaza City].

"The people in the command room stared at Chico, stunned and shocked. No one believed that the ground forces could reach ... Hamas' control center in Gaza City. Moreover, no one had any idea how to do it. ... The price of the vicious circle of not using the ground forces, and the lack of confidence in them, had brought the army chiefs to an impasse."

The rest is known. The ground forces, both the conscript units and the reservists, took control of much of the Strip and routed Hamas. Granted, the role of technology, the close support of air and ground firepower, and advanced intelligence capabilities was clear.

The question remains: Will these capabilities be enough for bigger challenges – a regional war or the ground war with Hezbollah in Lebanon that might happen soon?

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