

“Air power may not always deter enemies. History might teach us that. This is where my concern lies. I think Israel will have to deliver heavier blows to these enemies.” – Seth Frantzman

By Jerry Gordon and John Adams, Brig. Gen. US Army (ret.)

THE OCTOBER 7 WAR



Israel's Battle for Security in Gaza

SETH J. FRANTZMAN

Background

In late September 2024, Israel unleashed a trio of spectacular strikes against Iran's proxies, Hezbollah and the Houthi Rebels in Yemen, in a multi-front war for the Jewish State's survival in an existential war perpetrated by Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei. First came Mossad's stunning beeper and walkie-talkie remote-controlled explosions, which created chaos among

Hezbollah and adherents throughout Lebanon. Second were the precise bunker-busting IAF air attacks that assassinated Hezbollah Secretary General Hasan Nasrallah's leading commanders, also killing an Iranian senior IRGC general. There have been more IAF bombings of Hezbollah weapons storage centers and launch sites. Then, to send a message to Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei and the IRGC, there were simultaneously long-range IAF bombing attacks on the Houthi Rebel-held port of Hodeida on the Red Sea. These acts indicated that Israel had impressive intelligence to track and undertake these missions. Israel was asserting its sovereign rights to deter its existential enemies, Iran and its proxies. On October 1st, 2024 Israel announced its long-promised ground attack in Southern Lebanon focused on eliminating Hezbollah Redwan forces' rocket, missile, and drone sites, as well as underground cross-border tunnels. The entry into Southern Lebanon was to enable the return of more than 60,000 Israeli civilians in northern towns and farms who were displaced by thousands of Hezbollah rockets, drones, and missiles launched since October 8th, 2023, in support of Hamas' war with Israel in Gaza. Hezbollah Rockets and missiles are now threatening Central Israel. Hezbollah started its rocket, drone, and missile attacks the day after the October 7th Hamas pogrom attack on Southern Israel Kibbutz, Nova Dance Festival, and towns like Sderot. It was a brutal attack that slaughtered 1,200 Israelis and foreigners, seizing over 250 hostages, 135 of whom were released, or their remains returned, leaving 109 remaining to be freed. Something had gone wrong with Israel's Military intelligence and assessment that Hamas had been deterred and was not able to undertake such a brazen attack. This leads us to why we reached out to discuss the emerging developments with Seth Frantzman, author of his latest book, *The October 7 War: Israel's Battle for Security in Gaza*.

Seth Frantzman, PhD, is the senior Middle East correspondent for *The Jerusalem Post* and Israel correspondent for *Breaking*

Defense. He is an adjunct fellow at the Washington, DC-based Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD). He is the author of several influential books: *Drone Wars*, *Pioneers*, *Killing Machines*, *Artificial Intelligence*, and *the Battle for the Future*, and *After ISIS, America, Iran, and the Struggle for the Middle East*. We will be discussing his views about Israel's War against Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, backed by Iran, based on his latest opus: *The October 7th War: Israel's Battle for Security in Gaza*.

Mark Dubowitz, Chief Executive of the FDD in *The Forward* to *The October 7th War* wrote:

"The October 7 war provides a glimpse into the challenges Israel faced as it returned to fighting a ground war in Gaza after many years of trying to deter Hamas and prevent a war of this kind. The story unfolds as it happened, showing how Israeli commanders, officials, and politicians grasped for a strategy as the war developed. This provides a spotlight on some of the roads not taken during the Gaza War and also an overview of both tactical and strategic picture."

Presciently, Dubowitz opines: "It may be a prelude to much larger conflicts in the region, between Hezbollah and Israel and a direct war between Israel and Iran."

What follows is our discussion with Seth Frantzman. WATCH the Video of the discussion [here](#).

Jerry Gordon: Seth, why did you write *The October 7th War* after only eight months of the conflict sparked by the Hamas pogrom in southern Israel?

Seth Frantzman: Well, thank you for having me on.

The book I wrote took shape within the first month or so of the war. I was down on the Gaza border the first day and then the second day as it all unfolded and as the mass massacre and

murders became clear. And it was clear that this war was a turning point in the region.

It's going to be massive. I understood that, and I was already taking notes daily on all the units involved and interviewing many people.

I had a lot of excellent access from the beginning. More access, I think, than any war I'd covered in the past, in terms of meeting different units and going down with them as they trained, and as they went into) Gaza, getting to go in, and things like that. So, I knew I had a lot of material here, and I felt it would be a shame to let that material sit.

You know, it's easy to take 100,000 words of notes. It's easier than you think. And then you realize afterward that you don't do as many things as you'd like with it, or you turn it into lots of little pieces.

But, you know, you don't see the forest for the trees. And I understood that this could be a book. I met with the same publishers I'd done drone wars with, which I think was very interesting; it was a focus on military technology.

But suppose you look at the three books: *After ISIS* and *Drone Wars*. In that case, I think they are, in some ways, a multi-volume series because *After ISIS* is about the decline of the state system in the region and how it was taken over by jihadist extremist groups that kind of, as we know with ISIS, took over Syria and Iraq and threatened the whole region. So, the states declined. And what came with the decline of the Arab states was, as we know, Iran and Turkey filling that vacuum that ISIS left behind.

And then this very obvious clash that was coming between Iran and America and Israel. So, I sketched that out. I had been on the ground, so it was partly my story of being there.

And then, *in Drone Wars*, I talked about the transition of

military (4:15) technology, which was very clear: it is essential in the region and how it underpins the wars. And then October 7th, in my view, is just a whole another chapter, in a sense, of this more significant war that's taking place between the West and enemies of the West, enemies of Western civilization, which are Iran backed by Russia or China or other countries. So, in my sense, October 7th is a shot in that war.

And I was lucky enough to have the support from the publisher to explore that. I intended the book to be partly a first-person account and partly a story of the survivors and the fighters. And I wanted it to be similar to a book if one were to write about Pearl Harbor up to the Doolittle Raid.

So, not the whole, you know, you can cover Pearl Harbor without covering the surrender five years later, right, or four years later. You can cover it from Pearl Harbor to the Doolittle Raid as a chapter in history. And then you can cover the whole meetup about how the Empire of Japan, you know, became so powerful that it could attack Pearl Harbor in the first place, I mean, against a naval power like the United States.

So, I thought of it like that, or like a book about 9/11, where you look at 9/11 and then at the initial invasion of Afghanistan or something, and that's all. Because why would you cover, you don't want to, why would you cover the whole Afghan war? That deserves to be a whole other book. So, that's kind of how I looked at it.

And I wanted to write a book that I wanted to read because I felt this was such a vast war. It's tough to understand it by reading one article that's 800 words repeatedly. You do not, you do not understand, or it's very) hard to understand the breadth of it and all the fronts and all the people involved.

I didn't want) The book is political, as you can see from the

introduction. It's not about politics. It's not a judgment of whether or not, you know, Joe Biden or Bibi Netanyahu did this or that.

I mean, you know, history will judge that. But I think it is more about the soldier's tale, which I thought was interesting.

Jerry Gordon: Do you believe that the IDF has achieved the original objectives of destroying Hamas and the PIJ in Gaza?

Seth Frantzman: Well, I think the objectives are complicated in war.

If you were to, the way they phrased it here, or the way there's been a bit of a change in the terminology. So, early in the war, the story was, in Hebrew even, that there wouldn't be Hamas in Gaza. And then it became, you know, as you just said, destroying Hamas, destroying maybe the military and governing capabilities of Hamas, or degrading it, or whatever.

Or, in some cases, people say, making sure it's no longer a threat. You know, those are very complicated, generalized terms. And if you fight a war like that, let's say you fought the civil war by saying, the US Civil War, by saying, well, we want to make sure the US South is no longer a threat to the Union.

And we want to degrade the capabilities of the Confederacy. Well, you could argue that by 1844, the capabilities of the Confederacy had been primarily degraded. Therefore, you could end the war and leave.

And obviously, the Confederacy would still exist then. This is not a judgment on whether the Confederacy is similar to Hamas. I don't; it's not the comparison I'm trying to make. I'm making a military comparison, which is if you choose to wage a war in which you're just interested in weakening enemy capabilities, and in my belief, the enemy still controls the

field at the end of the battle. Historically, the people who control the field at the end of the struggle will generally, if they don't win the war, at least they fight you to some middle ground. So, I sense that, yes, Israel has achieved the goal of destroying Hamas's military capabilities, not the governing capabilities.

I think Hamas still governs 80% of Gaza, so it's partly destroyed. And look, Hamas, as a terrorist organization, should never have had military capabilities to begin with. So therefore, the destruction of the capability is something Israel should never (have had to do).

Because if you look at the reports in Israel on October 8th or 9th, it was said that Hamas has 24 battalions of fighters. That's 30,000 men or so, according to the story. And Islamic Jihad is like a few thousand.

It's not so; it's not as important. Well, Hamas should never have had 24 battalions to begin with. So, it was allowed to grow, and it's now been reduced to back where it was in 2003.

But we know how dangerous it was in 2003. So, this is my concern. And I think that if your stated objective is reducing capabilities, you can check that box.

It does not mean you win the war; you defeat the enemy. So, I think that's kind of the crossroads we're at, at this very moment, in Israel. Go ahead, Jerry.

Jerry Gordon: Did the IDF have intelligence of a possible Hamas attack? And why was it not acted on by senior military echelons?

Seth Frantzman: I mean, from my understanding of this, and I, again, this is an early book. So, intelligence experts, archives, and things will be open in years to come. And eventually, we will discover more of that intelligence) in that picture.

According to our reports, I can only paint you a tiny part of that puzzle: I think the IDF had some intelligence about Hamas plans. Hamas had a plan to start a mass invasion of Israel. And the Unit 8200 intelligence guys got pieces of it.

Officers went to their superiors and said, "Look, this is the plan." And, you know, because of the conception in Israel at the time, which Hamas is deterred, Hamas cannot possibly carry this out. And we're paying Hamas to be excellent.

Qatar is paying via Israel to keep them nice. The theory was they couldn't carry it out. Therefore, the puzzle pieces were there, but no one believed it was possible.

And Israel had invested a billion dollars in a high-tech fence like the Maginot Line. And people didn't take it seriously in terms of its capabilities. They left five or 600 combat soldiers to face, you know, 3,000 to 6,000 enemy fighters, which is not, even if you're an outstanding combat soldier, those are not great odds. I think the IDF had a lot of information, but the whole story of intelligence work is always about information. All sorts of things come in, but how do you know what to choose? What is important? What is it? How do I grade it? I think they tried. I think they made serious errors.

Hopefully, they'll learn from that. Similar errors were made in 73. Several similar errors are made every time a country is taken by surprise in history.

So, unfortunately for Israel, it cost 1,200 lives and 250 hostages, of which more than 100 are still held there.

Jerry Gordon: what prompted the resignation of the IDF military intelligence director head and the intel in Unit 8200? Well, I think, you know, there's a strong sense within the IDF that they admitted to failure. They've taken

responsibility. And what they've said, including those people you mentioned, but as well as others, is that we failed, and we have to take responsibility.

Now, there's also a sense in Israel that we cannot; we're not going to investigate this war until it's over. The IDF is doing its investigations, but the bigger political investigation will not happen for a while. And then there's also a sense that you can't replace all the leaders during the war.

Now, as a student of military history, I would say that's incorrect. You know, President Lincoln went through lots of commanders. Of course, you can replace people, but Israel has chosen not to replace them.

It feels that that wouldn't be good. So, there was a sense that people shouldn't all resign immediately because there would be no top brass. And I think that's fine.

Therefore, what they did was wait a while, and they're going to resign bit by bit, and they will take responsibility. And they understand) that when it comes to the intelligence aspect, as well as the division commander on the border of Gaza and probably Southern Command, those people have to take responsibility for their errors. Hopefully, the question is if they will learn from them and go back and see what they could have done better, and all of that will come out.

So, we'll see what happens.

John Adams: How effective was General Goldfuss, the commander of the 98th Division, in developing tactics to discover and destroy Hamas tunnels and combat battalions, given his promotion and reassignment of the 98th for possible ground operations in Lebanon?

Seth Frantzman: General Goldfuss is a legend in his community and greatly admired by Israeli soldiers.

He came into the battlefield already with a great reputation. The 98th Division is different. It's a division comprised of paratroopers and the commando brigade.

It comes to the field with a lot of experience and some of the best types of elite fighters. It's an elite infantry division comparable to your capabilities in the US Army Rangers, paratroopers, and many other units. It brings many capabilities and is commanded by someone very capable.

When it went into Gaza, it initially went into Khan Yunus. Khan Yunus is the headquarters not only of the Khan Yunus Brigade of Hamas but also of; it's where Yaya Sinwar, the Hamas leader, is from. So, the 98th Division was up against the worst of the worst in terms of Hamas that had festooned that area with tunnels.

Yahya Sinwar is a bit of a Pablo Escobar type of cartel-figure in which he's not just a terrorist; he's more than that. He's a mafia cartel-type leader. So, he's very grounded, I think, in his community, just like Saddam Hussein when he was toppled, who ran away to Tikrit, Iraq where he was from, because he's a clannish tribal warlord.

So, we have to understand what Goldfuss, and his men faced there; most of them were men. I guess some women played a role in Gaza much more than in the past as fighters. The troops of the 98th Division had to go underground and fight. I think what he said, a 720-degree war where he described a kind of fighting, were two cones on the top and the bottom.

It's certainly unique in terms of going after, you know, hundreds of miles of tunnels. Maybe it was dozens of miles in his sector, but overall, we're talking hundreds. So, I don't know if there is a comparison to what the US faced in the Iron Triangle in Vietnam, where you had many tunnels. But it's certainly a unique type of battlefield that has rarely been seen before.

And they also had to be more precise in Khan Yunus in terms of civilian casualties because the IDF was heavily criticized for the first two months of the war, where there was, was a belief that there were too many casualties in the northern part of Gaza, and too much of the city was destroyed. So, they had to fight a very precise war. He brought the right tools for that because who else would you want than commandos and paratroops if you fight a precise war in an urban environment? He also was given the 7th Armored Brigade, which is not part of the 98th, but he was given it so that they could have some armor capabilities as well.

And then they sent Dan Goldfuss's 98th Divisional around Gaza as a kind of firefighting crew to deal with all sorts of other hard cases, like going back into Subija to find many of the bodies of hostages in recovery operations, which are the worst kind of operations. if you're going to recover corpses. He did an outstanding job, and now they've sent them north. And it makes sense because putting the 98th in the north against Hezbollah provides the other division up there, the 36th, which is an armored division, with exactly the capabilities you want. Because if you have a heavy armored division, backed by a lot of artillery and a lot of tanks, and you pair it with paratroopers and the commando brigade, it's just exactly what you want as a strong fist to go right into southern Lebanon and destroy the Hezbollah infrastructure there.

And given the experience in Gaza dealing with tunnels, you'd be putting in the right people. I mean, the commandos in Israel have fought a long, brutal war. I spent some time with some commando reservists recently, and they've been called up for eight months of the last 12.

These are reservists. They usually were sure they wouldn't usually serve that much time. So, this has been a difficult war for them.) There has been a big learning curve, but they've done an outstanding job.

Goldfuss was responsible for that, as well as all his battalion and brigade commanders and people above and below him. Israel is fighting a six-front war with Iran, its proxies, Hamas, Hezbollah, Syrian and Iraqi militias, and now the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

John Adams: What should be Israel's priority targets for effective deterrence? That's the central question: How does Israel return to deterrence? I think that's not the case at the moment.

Seth Frantzman: Killing Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon was important. But I think the calling the bluff of Hezbollah in general, which is what Israel's done in the last few weeks of the attack, killing dozens of commanders, showing that it's a bit of a paper tiger. We don't know yet, but it seems at least some of its capabilities have proven to be that. When it comes to deterrence, you have to destroy the enemy totally.

But in this case, Israel has several enemies. I would argue that Israel should destroy one or two of these Iran proxies and send around a message that this can never happen again.

So, as we mentioned before, discussing the whole issue of whether Hamas is defeated, in my view, Hamas has not been knocked out of the picture, and it should be eviscerated and defeated.

To send a message that if you kill a thousand people and more Jews than at any time since the Holocaust, then you will cease to exist as a group, as an organization, as a command structure, as every piece of you. So, I would have argued they should have eviscerated Hamas a few months ago and then done the knockout blow with Hezbollah. What they've chosen to do is defeat Hamas, like 90%, and keep it down.

And then they've gone up north to hand Hezbollah, an ostensibly more powerful group, a knockout blow. To give Hezbollah a real knockout blow, you have to go in on the

ground and destroy them. So, again, my concern is, if we don't see a ground offensive in Lebanon and a big one, Israel will have reduced the capabilities of two fronts by like 80 or 90%, but it still leaves the boxer in the ring.

I think this is a concern. Therefore, I don't believe Israel can deter the Houthis or the Iraqi militias as easily because they're quite far from Israel. I also don't believe air power wins wars very well.

I know there are a few examples where it did. In Kosovo, they got the Serbs to leave, so it achieved some objectives.

The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ostensibly won WWII with Japan. But I don't think anyone's talking about using nuclear ordinance. My sense is air power doesn't necessarily deter enemies.

I think history might teach us that. That is where my concern is. I think Israel will have to deal more heavy blows to these enemies.

To destroy one of them at least sends a message. And that's where we'll have to look in the next year to see if that can happen, or maybe the next few months.

John Adams: Well, as you know, we're seeing some small-scale fighting across the border in Lebanon, north of the Israeli town of Adamit. It is a challenging terrain to fight on, as I'm sure you know. I have personally laid eyes on that terrain. It's tough.

But we've seen some small-scale fighting there. And the United States, for its part, continues to be concerned about escalation to try to keep the idea from doing more. Has the United States been, and specifically, the Biden Administration been cooperative or obstructive in supplying critical weapons and ammunition and supporting its ally, Israel?

Seth Frantzman: I think the question of whether the Biden administration has been what its overall historic role will be seen in this war is complicated.

The administration has supported the military relationships with CENTCOM on many levels, and that works quite well. I also think the defense relationship between Yoav Galant and his counterpart, the Secretary of Defense Austin, works quite well.

Although we've heard a bit of a clash about the Hezbollah threat, I don't think the relationship between the top-level Biden and Netanyahu will probably work well. They've been supportive, but many strange controversies don't send the right message. Now, there was a question of some ordinance that was withheld, but I think that Israel has most of what it needs.

If you tell the Iranians or the proxies that any ordinance is being held up, they will think that's great news. If you tell them, well, the U.S. wants a ceasefire, and you know, a lot of messaging from Washington has been pressuring Israel, not pressuring Hezbollah or Hamas or the backers of Hamas, like Turkey, Qatar, Iran, Russia. So, that's where I think the problem is a lot of the messaging.

And I think this is a region where messaging matters. I mean, if you're a Sinwar or Sinwar's backers and other Hamas members in Doha and they hear that Washington is pressuring a ceasefire, then they think, well, we don't have to give up. We have to wait.

And that's where the problem, I think, is, which is not a question of war material goods or whether or not the support is there. America is very supportive of Israel. But I do think this mixed messaging that constantly comes out is always going to feed Israel's enemies, and they feed off of that, and they think, okay, well, we don't have to give up.

And that's where I think it sometimes prolongs the war, probably needlessly.

John Adams: How important was Israel's relationship between the IDF and CENTCOM?

Seth Frantzman: Between the Ministry of Defense and CENTCOM, between the Ministry of Defense and our Department of Defense, was essentially a good news story. But the question is that I have is, I know that we, the U.S., played a role in deterring or blunting Iran's attack with drones and missiles in April. Was that a good message? Or what was the impact of that message? I think the coordination between the U.S., CENTCOM, Israel, and other countries in the region or in the West; I think the coordination against the Iranian missile threat is undoubtedly a watershed moment because there were 500 drones, rockets, drones, ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles.

It was unprecedented. The coordination was great, and it all worked very well.

The only side to it is you have to wonder if some people say, well, the Iranians might say, okay, if CENTCOM is not there, then we can do this again. Or, you know, if the U.S. doesn't have an aircraft carrier here in the region, we could do this again. So, I think there's a concern that it leads to a perception that Israel cannot defend itself, which historically, Israel always basically only relied on itself. I think that's where the Iranians may start to think, well, okay, we need to find a way to get the Americans out of this picture or get the Americans to tell the Israelis, listen, we're not going to help you next time. That's the only policy question I think you'd have an issue with. But I think in terms of the person-to-person relationships formed between individuals in CENTCOM and their counterparts in Israel, the chief of staff level or below that, I think that's been phenomenal.

That's what I have heard. So, it's very, very good. And it's only getting better regarding joint training and joint work and discussions.

After debriefing, I will discuss what works and what doesn't work. So, it seems to be working well. I think I will always be a question as to what the policy of the United States is. And what is the policy of Israel? And do they agree on certain things? I mean, look at what you mentioned, the airstrikes in Yemen. The Americans were also supposed to be dealing with this Red Sea issue. I think Operation, or whatever it's called Prosperity's Guardian, has not entirely gone as planned. So, someone will have to go back and look at that and see, you know, America has since for more than 100 years has fought for freedom of the seas. It shouldn't allow a group like the Houthis to weaken that.

Jerry Gordon: Seth, based on your own experience in Mosul and Iraq during the ISIS war, do you agree with both former British Afghan war commander, retired Colonel Richard E. Kemp and retired US Major John Spencer of the West Point Center for Modern Warfare that the IDF has fought a just war against Hamas?

Seth Frantzman: Yes, I think the war against Hamas has been mostly just. I mean, is there any more just cause if someone massacres thousands of your people and takes 250 hostages? You should have a right to go in there and totally destroy the organization and eliminate the people that were involved. Unfortunately, thousands of people were involved in this.

And if they're hiding under schools or in schools or UN facilities or under buildings, and they exploit the medical infrastructure and so cynically, it makes it very, very difficult. That's why the shame is the international community is not doing more to make sure Hamas is disentangled from all these NGOs and UN structures. All they've done is allow them to wriggle their way in.

I think it has been a just war. I mean, you know, wars are not clean. It's not easy. Nothing's perfect.

This isn't chivalry with two knights charging each other in armor. This is a complicated conflict.

Lots of civilians, I think, have suffered. Some have died. And I'm sure there are all sorts of things that Israel could sometimes have done better against just the worst type of enemy. I think that the real just cause is going in and getting the hostages out and making sure that they're all free and not leaving them there and making sure that this is never done again. And I think sending the messages that no organization will try this again.

Jerry Gordon: What do you regard as the most important lessons learned from the October 7th war with Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran proxies? The biggest lesson is that you should never underestimate your enemies.

You always have to ensure that if you're in a room, there's a bunch of people at the top military brass, intelligence people, or cabinet level. And everyone says we don't think this enemy is important. At the same time, you've thousands of trained terrorists on your border.

Someone should raise their hand and say, okay, well, I get it that you guys all think it's not important. But, you know, what if they are? What if there's, what if they are more than a threat than you think? What's the worst-case scenario that can happen? And the worst-case scenario in this case is not only that you have 1,200 dead and 250 taken hostage, but that the Hamas attack will set in motion a wider Iranian multi-front threat that will empower Iran and lead to a multi-front war. That is just what happened at the start of the First World War with the killing of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

No one thought that this random Archduke being killed would set in motion the Great War, in which huge numbers of people

died, But it did set it in motion. So now, no one could have prevented that necessarily. But I'm just saying that you never know how something small can set in motion something much larger.

I think it would have been wise for Israel, the United States, and other countries to be much more wary of this and, hopefully, have had the intelligence services of our allies and friends in the region share threat information. So that's where we are.