**Acknowledgements**

This book is the fruit of several years of hard work, from the first moment that the initial idea germinated to its full blossoming in this, the finished product. My dream to succeed and to address this topic comprehensively and in-depth way grew ever stronger thanks to the many incredible people I had the privilege of having by my side during the fascinating—and challenging—journey of researching and writing this work.

To my wife, Avital, for our home together, for your faith and *ayin tova*—generosity and pride—in me; for instilling in me the confidence and the joy to grow and develop; for giving me the chance to dream big and make the dream come true, for listening, giving support, patience, understanding, encouragement, and wise advice; and for your belief in me. *Mine is yours, and yours is mine*. To my children, for being the great light that you are, for your kind hearts, your unconditional love, and your wide smiles that fill me with all the strength in the world.

To my parents, who gave me everything—for allowing me to grow and to develop my talents, while always inspired by your profound and admirable educational wisdom; for your limitless physical and spiritual support throughout my journey; for being role models of good and ethical people, whom we all have looked up to for so long.

To the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at Bar-Ilan University—an institution to which I am proud to belong, which fosters excellence, open-mindedness, professionalism, profound learning, and friendship. To its faculty members, who are not only professional colleagues but also amazing people, and to the students from whom I learn so much all the time.

To my PhD supervisor, Professor Eliezer Tauber, who continues to accompany me on my academic journey, for all the sound advice, reflecting your deep experience, that you have so generously and readily offered me throughout this odyssey, and which has proven its value time and time again, and which you have given out of your personal care for my well-being and genuine desire to support me in finding my way in my doctoral studies and academic life. To my postdoctoral supervisor who has become my friend—Professor Richard Shultz, head of the International Security Studies program at Tufts University’s Fletcher School, for opening the gates to the American academic community during a fellowship year that was so very significant, instructive, and fruitful.

To Professor Assaf Moghadam, Dean of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at Reichman University, who has been by my side with advice and support throughout the course of my work.

To the Menachem Begin Institute for the Study of Underground and Resistance Movements at Bar-Ilan University, for your generous scholarship from the very beginning of this journey, which made it possible for me to start the process of writing this work. To the family of Mordecai and Monique Katz for their generous Shoff scholarship that has enabled me to successfully complete my research in its final stages of writing.

To the staff of the library at Bar-Ilan University, for your service that went above and beyond, and for providing me with all possible assistance in finding sources, even during the most difficult days of the coronavirus pandemic restrictions. To all of the other archives and libraries that have willingly opened their doors to me—sometimes to me exclusively—and thus helped me obtain unique and valuable sources for my research.

To my lecturers in Arabic and Persian who taught me during my undergraduate, master’s and doctoral studies. To the many friends that I have had the privilege of meeting during my journey, all of whom it would be impossible to name here, but each and every one of whom bestowed their good will upon me.

I would also like to thank Academic Language Experts, especially Susann Codish and xxxx, who undertook the work of translating and editing this book with the highest level of professionalism.

And over and above all else, my heart is filled with gratitude to God, who in goodness renews His creation every day, and who has carried me on His shoulders all the way, sometimes quite miraculously. And every moment I am blessed by His grace and great goodness.

**Prologue**

As I write these lines, Israel is in the midst of a war with Hamas in Gaza, which began following Hamas’ attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.

Hamas launched its attack during the early hours of a Saturday morning, which was also the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, the last of the Jewish High Holidays during the first month of the Jewish calendar. Over a thousand Hamas operatives entered Israel at the same time—through breaches they had made in the border fence, or on routes that bypass it from the air and sea. They attacked Israeli settlements and bases, as well as groups of civilians who had been enjoying an all-night nature party, exercising, or traveling along the road. During the attack, around 1,200 Israelis were murdered, some extremely brutally. From that day, until the time of writing these lines in December 2023, a war has been waging in Gaza, in which Israel is seeking to destroy Hamas’ governmental and military capabilities.

We can analyze the October 7 attack and the war that broke out in its wake from several different and varied perspectives. This was an extraordinary event—and in some respects, it is difficult to find any parallels with it in terms of both its characteristics and its intensity, either in the history of conflicts in general, and certainly not in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One area that has been the focus of considerable discussion since the October 7 attack involves the field of intelligence. On the one hand, there has been widespread concern over Israel’s failure to offer any prior warning about Hamas’ attack plans, both in a conceptual sense—the Israelis being bound to the conception that Hamas had been deterred and did not seek to escalate its actions at the time—and in a military-strategic sense—of identifying the preliminary signs of an attack, issuing an alert, or and preparing the army to thwart it before it occurred, or, at the very least, as soon as it began.

Alongside this very public discussion, and in the more focused context of the book that you, the reader, have before you, many are seeking to understand how Hamas was even able to accomplish such a successful and effective attack. Here, the intelligence component is dramatic—there is considerable evidence to indicate that Hamas had extensive and accurate preliminary intelligence regarding Israel’s military capabilities around Gaza. It had excellent knowledge of the operational routines and the weaknesses of the very defensive capabilities that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had been building up for years—and into which Israel had invested billions of dollars and incorporated the latest smart technologies. On the day of the attack, Hamas was able to break through this defense system both quickly and extensively. Furthermore, Hamas had accurate information about what was happening inside Israeli territory.

The manner in which Hamas attacked IDF bases in the area surrounding Gaza pointed to its prior knowledge regarding their role and structure. Hamas also had detailed intelligence on physical plans, operations, and residents of the Israeli settlements. Maps and information discovered on the bodies of the terrorists who carried out the attack indicated that they had known very well exactly where to go and where to strike.

The timing of the attack also suggest that Hamas has a significant level of intelligence-gathering, analysis and study of the Israeli side. On the general level, Hamas was closely following the growing divide in Israeli society revolving around the legal reforms promoted by the government that was elected in November 2022 and the widespread protests the reforms generated. These included public demonstrations and even talk of refusing to serve in the army should the reforms become enacted into law. We can assume, with a high degree of confidence, that the timing of the attack—which had been years in the planning—was linked to Hamas’ assessment that Israel was at one of the lowest points in its history in terms of social cohesion. On the very particular level, Hamas chose to carry out its attack on a Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath, when there is always a certain thinning of Israel’s military apparatus) that also coincided with a Jewish holiday—Simchat Torah—to take advantage of the IDF’s reduced ability to respond.

In addition to Hamas’ ability to gather and analyze intelligence and study Israel, the October 7 attack demonstrated the group’s counterintelligence capabilities. Hamas managed to conceal both its preparations for the attack and its decision to carry it out so successfully that although Israel did have information that *something* was about to take place, the information it had did not pass the threshold that would cause an alert. One of the ways in which Hamas was able to achieve this level of secrecy was through high levels of compartmentalization within Hamas itself, whereby only isolated individuals were privy to the knowledge regarding the decision to carry out the attack and the exact date on which it would occur. The terrorists recruited to carry it out were given knowledge about it only immediately prior to its execution. Hamas’ ability to conceal its plans from Israel indicates that the organization is continuously studying Israel’s intelligence capabilities and developing methods to plan and carry out operations without being discovered by Israel.

Moreover, according to information that is gradually being revealed about the October 7 attack—or Operation Al-Aqsa Flood as Hamas refers to it—the operation was preceded by a scheme of deception that was carried out both at the strategic and the tactical levels. At the strategic level, Hamas deliberately messaging deliberately indicated that its main focus was economic issues. A recent piece of journalism has claimed that Hamas even signaled its interest in a prisoner swap in return for Israeli captives in its hands. All of this fit very well into the line of reasoning among Israel’s political and security echelons, as reflected in the words of Israel’s military intelligence chief in September 2023: “In Gaza, I see that alongside the use of force and significant deterrence against Hamas, the processes that Israel has led […] for economic stabilization, the entry of workers [from Gaza into Israel], improving [quality of] life […] offer the potential for many years of peace.”

At the tactical level, in the period preceding the attack, Hamas instigated protests near the border, under cover of which its operatives were able to approach the border fence and place devices and structures alongside it, ostensibly as part of the demonstrations. In this way, Hamas was able to advance its preparations for the attack and complete its gathering of vital intelligence regarding the IDF’s capabilities along the border fence. Its understandings with Israel not only resulted in financial gains for Hamas (mainly Israel allowing the entry of workers from Gaza into Israel) in exchange for the cessation of the demonstrations. They were also part of the group’s wider plan to lull Israel into a false sense of security and reinforce Israel’s assessment that Hamas was not seeking escalation, and most certainly not an attack of this magnitude. Thus, despite there being quite a few signs on the ground, including evidence of training by Hamas to take over Israeli settlements and bases—no alarm bells were sounded within Israel’s security echelons.

Given all this, Hamas’ attack on October 7 had a crucial intelligence component, and it is essential to grasp this aspect in order to analyze how the attack was carried out. To fully understand how Hamas was able to reach this point, we need to study the longstanding intelligence war that the group has waged against Israel. In this book, the reader will find an in-depth examination of the development of Hamas’ various methods of intelligence-gathering, details of how the group has studied and analyzed Israel over the years, and of how it has worked to thwart Israeli intelligence’s ability to penetrate its ranks. Hamas’ use of counterintelligence is also not new, and has evolved over the years, as have its activities around using double agents against Israel.

Thus, beyond its historical contribution, this book also provides an answer to a fundamental question: How can an actor that is weaker from a military, technological, and resource point of view to achieve significant gains in an intelligence war against a strong opponent who is dozens of times more capable than it—as Hamas was able to do in its October 7 attack? The short answer is that Hamas has been able to develop an intelligence system that is ideal for its needs—which are fundamentally different from the needs of a state. The reader will find a longer and far more detailed answer in the analysis presented in this book. It is possible that greater knowledge of this important aspect of the intelligence capabilities of non-state actors such as Hamas—an area that, to date, has not been extensively researched—could prevent, or at the very least reduce, intelligence “surprises” of this sort, and could even help open an in-depth discussion on how states can deal with threats of this nature.