



MAY: In 2005, Israelis withdrew from Gaza. Every soldier, every farmer, every synagogue, every grave. It was an historic land for peace experiment, and it failed. In May, Hamas began firing missiles at Israeli cities, towns and villages, sparking the fourth armed conflict since Hamas defeated Fatah and began ruling Gaza in 2007. Many in the international media blamed Israel more than Hamas, despite the fact that it was Hamas that attacked. Despite the fact that Hamas used human shields, a violation of international and U.S. law. Despite the fact that Hamas' intentions toward Israelis are openly and unambiguously genocidal. Jonathan Schanzer, FDD's Senior Vice President for Research, a groundbreaking scholar of Middle Eastern affairs, has now produced the first and, so far, only book on this conflagration: *Gaza Conflict 2021: Hamas, Israel and Eleven Days of War*. He's with us today as is Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Conricus, who served as the International Spokesman for the IDF during the fighting.

I welcome them, and I welcome you, too, here on *Foreign Policy*. Dr. Schanzer, I'm calling you Dr. Schanzer because you're both named Jonathan. Of course you don't look exactly alike. But anyway, Dr. Schanzer, you wrote and published this book in record time. Tell us why you saddled yourself with such a tight deadline.

SCHANZER: Well, first thanks Cliff for hosting this and Jonathan, great to have you with us today. I watched that war more closely than I watched any other conflict in the 30 years that I've been doing this kind of work. And it was interesting. It wasn't, I think because of a keener interest, it was because of available technology. Through smartphones, smart TVs, I was able to watch Israeli TV in real time as the war unfolded. I was able to watch Arabic language television. I was able to watch what was coming in on my Twitter feed and to see how the U.S. media was covering it. I saw a massive disconnect between what was being reported and the analysis of that conflict and what was seen on the ground. What the Israelis were dealing with. And specifically, they were dealing with an Iran-backed terrorist organization that was not blamed for really anything during this conflict.

Israel was roundly vilified for its response to the provocation. But I think the real moment for me in this, I think, tracks immediately to Jonathan's presence with us today. The greatest disconnect actually took place on May 13th. That was when the IDF Twitter feed announced that ground forces were in Gaza. Immediately when I saw that tweet, I went into my family room. I turned on my television here in suburban DC, and I turned it to Channel 11 in Israel. It was very interesting. The Israeli reporters were saying, "We don't see troops going in and we can't confirm this story." So, I turned the channel to Channel 13 and same thing, the reporters are saying, "cannot confirm. None of my sources can say this. And we don't know what's going on." There was great confusion.

But what really struck me was that the American press, the foreign press, ran with the story anyway. Did not confirm it. Certainly they were not looking at the Israeli media, which is by far the best at covering this conflict. In other words, they're not air dropped in. These are people that live this day in and day out. And it just dawned on me that there was a massive disconnect between what our reporters write and what is happening on the ground in the Middle East. That is what prompted me to write the first draft of this in eight days.

MAY: Right. American journalism isn't what it used to be. Colonel Conricus, before we talk about the conflict, maybe you should just take a moment and tell us how it is that your career path in the military led to your doing hand to hand combat with the international press. Wouldn't it have been safer, more pleasant, more fun to be in something like bomb disposal?

CONRICUS: Yeah. Thank you Cliff and Dr. Jonathan. Great to be here. Thank you. I had the good fortune of doing quite a lot of different things in my 24 years of service in the IDF. I started as an infantry soldier and fought in Southern Lebanon against Hezbollah amongst other places. The famous or notorious Beaufort Castle in Southern Lebanon, the



former crusade castle, and a few years of fighting there from 1997 approximately, until the Israeli withdrawal in Lebanon, and then as a platoon commander, company commander in infantry.

But really most of my fighting days were in Gaza between 2000 and 2005, before the disengagement that you spoke about in the introduction. I spent the best part of five years defending Israeli civilians there. Fighting different terrorist organization underground. Hamas, the resistance committees, Islamic Jihad, they were up and coming then. They weren't really established yet. But those years on the ground really gave me the firm foothold or the standing that I thought and felt that I needed in order to be able to represent the IDF and to try to tell our story in the world, to the international media, and anybody who was interested in listening to our story and at least, or at least, getting any of our information out.

So, I had the good fortune of doing that. I spent, or I served, three years at the UN at a very interesting position. The first time that the IDF, that Israeli Defense Forces, sent an officer to the UN. So three years of understanding how that organization looks and writes and reports on Israel. Not from reading the reports from the outside, but actually being part of the process and seeing the mechanisms from within. Very interesting and very worrying. And if you want, we can elaborate about it. I had a lot of my concerns and fears confirmed, unfortunately.

And the last four years of my service as the International Spokesperson of the IDF, I dealt in social. Basically, I oversaw the Twitter and Facebook and all of the other social media accounts. We have about 8 million followers now on all of those accounts together. And of course being the face and voice of the IDF, as well as public diplomacy and also [outreach] liaison with different think tanks and institutions very much like your own. So yeah, it could have been easier maybe to do something more pure military and stay with my boots on the ground. But looking back, despite the episode that Jonathan mentioned, which we will speak about, I am very, very happy and very thrilled and grateful to have had the opportunity to present the IDF the way I did.

MAY: Maybe you start with this Colonel, but Jonathan, I want to hear from you too. The Israelis called this round of fighting, the fourth as we said since Hamas took over Gaza, Operation Guardian of the Walls, right? That's what the Israelis called it. Hamas called it, The Battle of the Sword of Jerusalem. Does that tell us anything about how each side viewed the conflict?

CONRICUS: I think it does. I think, frankly speaking that Hamas has always had more creativity and better names for their operations in terms of copyrights. I think that the name of the operation from a Hamas perspective really tells the story of what Hamas were trying to do. They started the operation because they wanted to reach out, connect, and to instigate the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, and to get them out of the streets and to cause massive violence. They almost succeeded. They succeeded more with Arabs in Israel, I think, than what they did with Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, which maybe they were a bit surprised by. And they were again, I'd say disappointed with the fact that Palestinians in Judea and Samaria voted with their feet and said, "well, no, we're okay as we are, and we don't want any of your Hamas adventures." But the name really tells the story of the Hamas strategy.

It also in a way tells the mindset of the IDF where yes, we are in a defensive position. I think everybody in the IDF, especially those with combat experience and who have served inside the Gaza Strip or participated in any of the four rounds of fighting that we've had, most people, I would probably say understand the very limited options and the very limited outcomes of military operations. Unless you are willing to go all the way and to try to generate some kind of regime change in Gaza. If you're not willing to go all that way, if you're not willing to take the fallout, the consequences, and the casualties on both sides, then I think it's clear - especially for the commanders and officers - that operations



in Gaza, they have a very set and predetermined area of influence. There are pretty rigid rules as to what happens and what happens as a result. What each side will try to do.

And in this operation that kind of followed along those lines. What I think was interesting this time was that everything happened very, very fast. Our operations started basically with the intensity, I think, that we rolled four or five days of combat from the 2014 operation into one day of combat in terms of the intensity of our strikes and the amount of ordinance that we delivered on terrorist targets. And so did Hamas. They fired more rockets per day than they have ever done at Israel. And looking ahead, I think that's a clear indication of what lies ahead. If again things spiral out of control, and if Hamas would think that military operations will gain them anything, then probably we will see very intense military operations. Again, international pressure on Israel, the outcry and international pressure fueled by international media. We will see hopefully no military gains for Hamas and nothing to show for their casualties, but we will see devastation and damaged terrorist infrastructure and civilian infrastructure in Gaza.

MAY: Lots of points to pick up on. But so, we go step-by-step, Jonathan, maybe tell us why Hamas decided at this particular moment this year, May of this year, now is the time for a fourth round of fighting against Israel? And a number of things set that off. Actually, I've seen different interpretations. What's your interpretation? What's in the book on this?

SCHANZER: Sure. Well, first of all, I'll just add that in addition to what Jonathan just said in terms of the names, I think it's a clear sign that Israelis are watching *Game of Thrones* and that was clearly what was inspiring at least the name of their side of the operation.

MAY: The Guardian of the Walls?

SCHANZER: That's right. But look, the timing of this also, I think tracks back to how Hamas named this to claim that they're defending Jerusalem. You'll recall that there was a lot of talk at the time in the lead up to the war, and even for the first days after the war. I addressed this very early on in the book that a lot of journalists were blaming the entire thing on an Israeli court decision relating to a real estate dispute in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. That there were a handful of Palestinian Arabs that were about to be evicted. And that it was Israel's provocative actions that led to this war.

Of course, what was not noted was that this was a dispute that was almost a century old. That we're talking about Jewish families that had owned this property, and then they were kicked out of that property when it was Jordanian occupation of Jerusalem. And then when Israel took it over again after 1967, they allowed these people to live in these homes and a legal dispute ensued. It took decades to reach a point where a decision was almost made and that this was purportedly the singular cause of the conflict in May of 2021. I think that's a ridiculous interpretation of history because, of course, at the end of the day, it's rockets and bullets that cause conflict, not a looming legal challenge in court, in a legitimate legal system. It was a very odd interpretation of events.

A more logical interpretation of those events would point to the cancellation of the Palestinian elections that had occurred the month before. Hamas was set to take part in those elections with the blessing of the Biden administration. And Cliff, you and I were on a phone call with a Biden administration official who insisted that, "oh, there's no risk here. It's going to be fine. And by the way, who is America to say who should take part in Palestinian elections in the first place?" But we all knew that would lead to disaster. That it would lead to Hamas gaining a foothold in the Palestinian Authority. We recommended against it. In the end, the Biden administration agreed as well, prompted Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority, to cancel those elections at the last minute. I think it's fair to say now, in



retrospect, that Hamas was furious and that they decided that what they could not win by the way of the ballot box, they would try to win in the battle for hearts and minds, which for them means waging war against Israel.

MAY: In that sense, the war was against Israel, but a major target would be Fatah and the Palestinian Authority and Mahmoud Abbas. That's true?

SCHANZER: Yes. I think they wanted to regain the sort of position of primacy that I think they've always thought they should have. And so, a war against Israel was an opportunity for them to thrust themselves into the limelight and to demonstrate that they were fighting against Israel and fighting for Palestinian rights at the expense of Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority.

MAY: Let me ask you again, one more thing, the other theory you saw in some of the press was that this was a battle that Hamas was waging to protect Al-Aqsa?

SCHANZER: Correct. And again, this came from the Sheikh Jarrah thing primarily, although also this was during Ramadan. So, there were restrictions on those that could ascend onto the Temple Mount as Israel has always had those in place. But we also saw during this time it was also Jerusalem Day. It was the day in which Israelis celebrate the unification of Jerusalem. There were Palestinians on the Temple Mount that had stockpiled rocks and were now essentially engaging in minor insurrections. The Israelis responded as they would in any circumstance like that and the tension mounted across the board. So, it was elections; it was Ramadan; it was Jerusalem; it was Sheikh Jarrah. But this idea of a single point of failure stemming from a legal dispute was a bit ridiculous, and really one of the first signs to me that the coverage was going to be ridiculous during this war.

MAY: And Colonel, so you're trying to explain to these foreign journalists, the truth of this situation and they're saying what? "No, you are wrong. The Israelis are evicting Palestinians from their homes. They are taking over and restricting the right to pray on Al-Aqsa. They're changing the status that we have maintained." Is that what it's like as you try to make a simple explanation of what's going on? They're not believing you?

CONRICUS: Yeah. That's definitely what they wrote and reported. But with retro perspective, I'd offer a few lessons learned or lessons identified. I don't think that they've been learned, but identified. Jonathan or Dr. Schanzer, you speak about the running up, the mount before the actual fighting started--- and media wise, if we analyze it, and I analyzed it with great frustration as it was happening, our voice, the Israeli voice, was missing and in terms of framing and shaping a narrative that was happening. And the ones that were framing and shaping the narrative and were feeding the international media the information that they wanted were Hamas, not Israel. And the fact that the international press started covering the fighting -- yeah, sure they covered the fire towards Jerusalem and they definitely mentioned it in the coverage -- but they had the framing that had been fed to them. And it corresponded very well with their general outlook on life and their beliefs and their politics regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and who is the strong side and who is the underdog. And it [fit] very nicely for most of the international media, specifically the American media overall -- not everybody, but in a generalization.

And I'd say that they had this handed to them and they accepted it and that was the coverage. And one of my biggest challenges -- the people who I work with and are responsible for -- one of our biggest challenges was to try and say, "well, we're not saying that this didn't happen, but this isn't the story, the story is that they fired rockets at our capital. Now, you have been fed and you are listening closely to what Hamas have been saying, and you're taking



the story that Hamas has, the yarn the Hamas has spun. And that is the story.” And it took us a lot of work to try to reshape that.

But I will say, in retro perspective, that I think Israel should have done a much better job at getting our message out. And here, I’m not speaking about the IDF -- conveniently, obviously -- I’m speaking about the State of Israel, getting our message out and saying “real estate” and really telling the story of what’s going on and why Hamas, our adversary, our enemy is doing what they’re doing. We didn’t do that. And we pay the price because in any military confrontation that we have with any our enemies and especially so with Palestinians, we will face an uphill struggle against pretty much a biased media.

Almost never, doesn’t even really matter what the situation on the ground is: We will face an uphill battle. We can make it better, or we can make it worse. And in this case, we didn’t do the prep work well enough. And I think that Jonathan, you speak about the biased and slanted coverage. Part of it is due to that as well. And I hope that my successor and that others who are now in the other positions in Israel will do a much better job at getting that message out before violence starts.

MAY: Go ahead, Jon.

SCHANZER: It’s interesting, Jonathan, that you say that. After I wrote the first draft of the book, I had an opportunity to go to Israel with FDD CEO Mark Dubowitz, and we went around and we talked to a number of senior officials within the military, at The Kirya, on the Gaza border as well. And one of the things that I walked away with, the impression that I got, and this is, I think, we always hear about the failings of Israel to explain itself during of times of conflict. This is not new, right? This is something that we’ve been hearing about for a very long time. And I heard one official tell me point blank, and I had never heard this before really: that when conflicts erupt, the State of Israel certainly would like to win hearts and minds and to begin to change some of the coverage.

But a lot of the messaging is in fact directed to Israel’s enemies on its other borders, to make it clear that Israel is not weak, that Israel is not afraid of a fight, that Israel will vanquish its enemies, and that has always been the tone and tenor of the Israeli media response. Right? What they’re trying to do is to prevent a multi-front conflict at all costs. And they sometimes forget that maybe the international community would like to hear about the softer side of Israel. And that may be why you see the slanted response from the Israeli government.

CONRICUS: Yeah, I’ll add to that, and I say that there are two main audiences: one being the domestic, the Israeli audience, where the message that the IDF wishes to convey is one of responsibility, of capability, and of resolve and intention to defend, and capability to defend, and to make our enemies pay a heavy price for attacking our civilians. That’s one message. And the key and number one audience is the Israeli domestic audience. And very correctly, as you point out, the second audience is our enemies. Whether it is Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, or Hezbollah in Lebanon, or their Iranian masters, wherever they’re hiding, or Iraqis or Syrians. When the IDF, when the Chief of Staff decided to take down high visibility targets and to do so very quickly, he wasn’t only sending a message to Hamas. And he wasn’t only interested in getting the message across to the Islamic Jihad that they’re going to forfeit important infrastructure if they continue firing rockets at our civilians. For him, and for many other Israeli commanders, it’s very clear that when we fight against one terrorist organization, all of the others are looking closely and watching and testing the waters to see if there’s weakness or to see if there’s any possibility, perhaps for them to gain anything and learning lessons for the future.



What goes missing, you say very correctly, and I agree, 100% is what about the world? What about the West? I can be unpolitically correct and say, nevermind the world. What about Western Europe and the U.S.? What about them? Do they get the message that Israel should be providing? Do we speak about how we limit the use of force? Do we speak about the constraint? Do we speak about how we are defending our civilians against the amazing military threats that we face? The barrages, the rockets, the tunnels, the anti-tank missiles? Hardly. The message that comes out from Israel is one of strength, of deterrence. And it's much more a military message than it is a diplomatic one. And speaking about enemies, that may be a good message. My point of view is obviously the international point of view, and I find it very lacking. And I think that many of the challenges that we face today and will continue to face also stem from this definition of priorities. And it is a definition of priorities within Israel, not only the IDF.

MAY: I want to move on to other topics. Before I do this, one other point I want you to address, Colonel, on this. Anybody in our audience who's read the Israeli journalist Matti Friedman knows this. If you see a piece in *The New York Times* or *The Guardian* that is egregiously misrepresenting history or facts, or what you said, you'll call the reporter up and you'll say how disappointed you are with them and ask them to come and have a cup of coffee with you and discuss it. If Hamas sees something they don't like truthful or untruthful, they don't handle it quite the way you do, do they?

CONRICUS: They don't. And I know this from personal firsthand of stories that were written in Gaza by stringers or actual correspondents journalists that were based inside Gaza, Gazans that work for *AP*, *Reuters*, *the New York Times*, *BBC*. They still have personnel inside Gaza. They are under immense direct physical and psychological pressure and terror by Hamas, very effectively. Hamas are very effectively controlling what goes out from Gaza, where the agency photographers take pictures, what they say, what they don't say, where they place their cameras. And the best way to prove it is just look at the thousands, if not tens of thousands of pictures, coming out of Gaza during this highly televised and highly photographed conflict. You won't see a single launchpad, a single launch site. You will not see it on *AP*, *Reuters*, *BBC*, *CNN*, *Sky*, never, ever will they show where they're firing from. And there were few brave correspondents who, after the fighting, went in and presented questions to Mahmoud al-Zahar and a few others and said, "you're committing war crimes and you're firing from populated areas." The reporters who did that were reporters who don't live in Gaza. Their stringers in Gaza would never do it because they know that the minute they do, that next day, or a few minutes after their family is in trouble, and they are in trouble, and that's controlling the narrative, and that's controlling the information that comes out from Gaza. And that's what the world sees.

SCHANZER: 100%, I can't agree with you more. You'd start to ask yourself: why Israel was cast as the aggressor? Well, you could see what Israel bombed. You could see the result. You never saw the people who were firing the rockets. You didn't see pictures of Hamas guys popping out of tunnels. It was extremely rare. And by the way, it didn't make it any easier that when Israel would release this information, it was usually military video, usually taken from above by a drone. So, it made it very clear that Israel had kind of penetrated Gazan airspace, and it really made it look like Israel was dominating this conflict, when, of course, I think we can now say with certainty that when you fire 4,000 rockets into civilian areas, you're probably the aggressor.

MAY: There's a lot of topics I want to get to at the time we have left, so try to be succinct. But let's start with this one: An interesting part of this conflict was the ground of assault that didn't happen. Jonathan, why don't you explain what I'm talking about? Go ahead.

SCHANZER: Well, this was—



MAY: Dr. Schanzer.

SCHANZER: Yeah, this was kind of what I talked about in the beginning, that there was a moment where the IDF tweeted that there were going to be ground forces. If there were ground forces in Gaza, it was a big surprise because everybody kind of knew that, at first, Bibi Netanyahu was somewhat phobic of a ground war, and I think probably for good reason; the history of that has been mixed as far as Israel's military history is concerned. But really, it was a turning point in the war because it was at that moment that Hamas began to insert its top commando fighters into what is now commonly known as its metro system of tunnels. And within minutes after that, IDF strikes began taking out chunks of this metro system and also taking out some of these Iranian trained commandos. It was described by many in the U.S. media as an Israeli information operation, and our guest today, Colonel Conricus, was the guy that they all pointed a finger at. They blamed him for being misled. And they blamed him for what was ultimately, in many ways, erroneous coverage of that moment during the war.

MAY: Well, talk about that, Colonel. Because, look, deception in warfare is not a new concept. I think it goes back at least to Sun Tzu. To what extent, tell us what you're willing to tell us about that episode, I guess I'll just say that.

CONRICUS: Yeah, definitely an interesting time. And what, as you say very correctly, and I said this, I think it was *CNN* the day after, I think it was with Stelter. And I said, "yeah, I made a mistake." And there was a lot of conflicting information. I understood that our forces had indeed crossed the fence and were indeed maneuvering when, in fact, at the time when I said that, they had not. And I simply had the wrong information at hand, and that is the information that we tweeted. And that is then what a lot of the international media -- not all of them -- but a lot of the international media reported. But let me put things into context in terms of the so-called deception. If the IDF wants to deceive Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists, it will not be by using or tricking or abusing *AP*, *Reuters*, *Wall Street Journal*, and whatnot. Hamas and Islamic jihad and Hezbollah, and many other terrorists--they know all too well that their best source of intelligence, not information, but real combat intelligence is none other than Israeli media. Channel 13, Channel 12, 11, especially 13, they're sudden correspondent, but not only him, they are on the ground reporting reality, streaming live. And it is very, very convenient for them, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad in this case, to simply listen to them. So, if the IDF had been trying to deceive Hamas and Islamic Jihad, using international media would've been the last thing to think of in terms of media. Because that is not what the target audience bases its perception and reality on. So, I know that I think this also connects a lot to the -- I'd say the feeling of self-importance that many correspondents and many journalists have, and maybe I'd say even a bit of righteousness -- and maybe some people were offended by having the wrong information. And I had a conversation with correspondents a few hours after. I was very forthcoming, and I told them, "Listen, I have been doing this now for four years with many of your predecessors and your predecessors' predecessors, never, ever has anybody blamed me for being untruthful."

They may not have always liked what I've had to say, but I have never been blamed to be untruthful. And I wasn't untruthful then. I had the wrong information and I apologized professionally for giving that out. Was I trying to deceive? Was the IDF trying to deceive? No, I was not. And it just, it was a good story. It was a good story because many reporters and the media, they like to write about themselves. They like to inflate the role that they have in operations. And it was a novel thing; an interesting story. But when you look at it really on the ground too, for terrorists, like Jonathan said, for Hamas operatives to get inside the tunnels and to deploy there, that takes a few minutes. That takes more than half an hour. If you look at the time and space, the moment that that tweet was issued was just a few, not so far, from when we started bombing the area. And looking at that, you can understand that, if that was intended to cause Hamas to get down to tunnels that wasn't a relevant time to be doing it.



And that's another piece of information, really a technical one, but that underscores that this was related to fog of war, too many hours without sleep, and conflicting information that unfortunately gave the international media, or many parts of the international media, a story that they were very happy to continue to cover and to analyze.

MAY: I want to get in this, couple more subjects in the time we have left in this podcast. Jon, the people who ask, "okay, this is the fourth war that Israel has had to fight against Hamas. Shouldn't Israel at a certain point go in and defeat Hamas once and for all? How many more of these wars do they want?" Or is that the idea that you "mow the lawn," you don't attempt to go in and totally relandscape the territory?

SCHANZER: I think there's a phobia in Israel of doing exactly what you've just described. The idea of leaving troops indefinitely. I mean, Jonathan mentioned that he was fighting in Southern Lebanon and they called that the war without name, where there was just a permanent presence of Israeli soldiers. It wasn't fully what would be described as an occupation. It just felt like an asymmetric conflict that dragged on to no end. And I think the fear is putting Israeli troops back into Gaza and having to fight a war against an Iranian back proxy with no real goal in sight, because, and this was an interesting thing that I heard also from senior Israeli officials and they call Gaza a "lost province." Nobody wants it, right? I mean, it was once under Egyptian control. They don't want it. The Palestinian Authority won't go back into it.

The Israelis don't want it. I mean, there's really nobody who actually wants this other than Iran by proxy. I'm not even sure Hamas wants it. It's a headache, just to try to keep food coming in and logistically to keep the lights on. So, the idea that Israel should go in and take care of business once, and for all? It's nice to say that as something that is possible, but really it's not a feasible outcome from the Israeli perspective. And so, we limp along, this was the fourth war. There will be a fifth. There's no doubt. And every time – and I think Jonathan can probably attest to this – every time there's another conflict, the Israelis see that Hamas has had an opportunity to build up its capabilities further than the one before. Whether it's more accurate rockets, rockets that go deeper into Israel, more sophisticated tunnels this time around, we saw drones in the air, but also underwater drones, as well. All of this is due to Iranian assistance. And the question is, what should Israel do about it? Short of utter devastation...

MAY: And this leads, Colonel, to my next to last question, because there's one more I have to get into today. My next to last question is this: as unpleasant as this conflict was, Israelis have to imagine the possibility that from Lebanon, where there are 150,000 missiles, those could be launched at the same time as Hamas that from Syria, where the Iranians have been trying to set up another front. There could be missiles launched. In other words, as bad as this was for Israeli strategists, and the IDF have to imagine the possibility that the missiles could be coming in from many directions simultaneously, and that's what they will have to fight. And they have to think about Iran is the puppeteer, pulling the strings that we let them off when this happens or do we go directly to the puppeteer? And that's a huge subject. And I'm asking you to very succinctly address it. And then I'll get to my exit question.

CONRICUS: I agree with almost everything you said. I was stupid enough to tell my daughter, they spent a few nights in shelter. We live in Kfar Saba, central Israel, a few miles northeast of Tel Aviv. And they spent, I think, five or six nights in bomb shelters for the first time in their lives. Unlike Israelis in Sderot, Be'er Sheva, Ashkelon, who, unfortunately, sadly are used to it. And I told her, "Listen, this was just the promo." This is just the very small presentation of capabilities that the bad guys have in simplistic terms. And I think that one of the biggest challenges that the IDF faces for the, again, speaking of audiences, the domestic audience, I think that now, after this last conflict in Gaza, people get it a bit more because many people have been saying this that, "well, this wasn't nice."



This was horrible, and we had civilian casualties, more than 10 Israelis died and there was damage, et cetera, but the Iron Dome did the job. Everybody knows, that if all of the terrorist organizations that are within striking range of Israel, if they decide to go all the way and fire rockets and risk the Israeli retaliation that will come and which will be furious, then they can rain down death and destruction on Israel. Because at the current situation, the Iron Dome batteries won't be able to intercept at all the same rate and we'll have to focus only on core infrastructure of the State. And Israeli civilians will have only 30 centimeters of reinforced concrete between them and warheads raining in on Israel. So, that is very sobering, and it's frightening to think about it as somebody who lives here. I want to see my great grandchildren succeed me in Israel and in the Zionist dream that we have. But it is a daunting future that we may have ahead of us. Specifically, with the fact that there are so many terrorist organizations with so many effective weapons at our doorstep. What I can say that we will be doing is, again, going back to what I said in the beginning of how we started this campaign with intense, massive, standoff fire and bombardments on different types of targets, including dual-use targets. Here again, the message was supposed to resonate clearly enough to Hassan Nasrallah and to other terrorists in the region who are paying attention.

Yes, we know that you can strike us, but if you strike us, you will be like Hassan Nasrallah in 2006, and people will be asking you, why did you bring destruction on Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, or wherever it is that you decided to fire on Israel from? So, it's more about, really: Unfortunately we're still at the very basic level of deterrence by fire power. We're not yet at the continuation of that dialogue with other means, to use causative parlance. And that's where we see the situation as it is now.

MAY: Okay. I've got lots of topics we haven't discussed, but just one more question. Be as brief as you can, but I do want to get it in. Jonathan, the Gaza conflict 2021, this 11-day war, who won?

SCHANZER: Look, from my perspective, Israel won militarily. It, I think, achieved all of its military objectives. It had what is commonly known as a "target bank" of pre-approved legal targets. They destroyed those. They destroyed the al-Jalaa Tower, which had a Signals Intelligence Operation designed to jam Iron Dome. It destroyed the metro system, which we've talked about, this Labyrinth of Tunnels. And it set back Hamas, I don't know if I can say significantly, but it set them back enough. It mowed the lawn. And it made it more difficult for Hamas to operate. I think that's the good news. And by the way, the Israeli casualties and the Israeli damage was limited. And by the way, I would say a measure of success, also, is the limited number of casualties on the other side. I don't know many other militaries that think in those terms. But the fact that there were roughly 200 people that were killed in the entire 11 days of conflict, with the amount of ordinance that was fired, was really unthinkable in terms of modern warfare.

So, in many ways it was a success. The problem is, is that Hamas regained the narrative and that Hamas always declares victory by losing. This is what happens time and again. That even though they look around and, you know, the Gaza City is in rubble. They still say, "We're still standing. We're still here. Our leadership is still alive. And therefore, we're going to live to fight another day on behalf of the Palestinian cause." Of course, I would dispute that it's the Palestinian cause. I would say at this point, it's the Iranian cause, or the Turkish cause, or the Qatari cause. Because those are the patrons, and we didn't even get into that today. But at any rate, both sides were able to declare victory, which is unfortunate because, I think, every time that happens, and we've now seen four rounds of this, it means that we're setting things up for the next round. And as I ended in my book, I noted that we will see round five, unfortunately, and it will probably be tougher and messier and uglier than the war that we just saw.



MAY: Colonel, for this conversation, let's have your final words and your final thoughts on that question.

CONRICUS: I think I agree on almost everything. I'll add that I'm a small student of military history in the Middle East. In many of our last conflicts, we do well on the battlefield, but we don't tie the ends in terms of the policy and the diplomacy and everything that needs to happen after in order to translate military activity into something that we can call long-term achievement. And I think that's what's lacking here as well, but it's very, I mean, it's easy to say, but it's extremely difficult to do any of that with a terrorist organization that has the charter, which is very similar to ISIS, perhaps a little bit less flamboyant, but the Hamas charter isn't very different to ISIS'. So at the end of the day, I think that for the foreseeable future, as long as Hamas is in power in Gaza, we will be in this type of reality and will be mowing the lawn.

It'll be like a kind of an attempt to balance the humanitarian suffering and the humanitarian tension inside Gaza as a way of letting off steam and lowering tensions. But then trying to limit Hamas from gains and developments in the future. And unfortunately, pessimistically, I also think that in the coming time we will see a fifth engagement with Hamas. What I know, even though I'm not in the position anymore. I think that the first day of the fifth engagement will be even more violent on both sides; Israeli and Hamas and Islamic Jihad than what we saw in 11 or 12 days of fighting in 2021. And that is, again, a very pessimistic outlook, unfortunately. But that's the issue when you're dealing with terrorist organizations at your doorstep: very little room for diplomacy and deal making.

MAY: A fascinating discussion, so many more topics we could get into to be continued for sure. For now, Jonathan Schanzer, congratulations on your new book. Very important to set the record straight. And I think you've done that remarkably well. Colonel, great to talk to you. I always learn from your analysis and your candor are very much appreciated. So thanks very much. And thanks to all of you. Thank you. And thanks to everybody who has joined us today here on *Foreign Policy*.