

# EYE TO EYE

Dani Haloutz

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*To my mother*

*My wife, Irit*

*And my family*

*With love*



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# PREFACE

Israel is a wonderful country. The thought that it was a dream just sixty-eight years ago increases the amazement as to the outcome. However, we cannot accept its existence as a given. Our existence in the Middle Eastern environment requires us to be constantly alert, and to build ourselves up socially, economically, and militarily, and to keep our deterrence capabilities fit. We must make every effort to track the routes to peace, but to be prepared to fight for our justice as well. The strength of a people is not assessed solely by the number of weapons in its hands, but primarily by the minds and hearts behind the weapons; by the willingness to join the national mission not only be during a security crisis, but in everyday life; in the ability to unite around social issues, not only about national security; in the ability to make decisions from a long-term perspective, and run the country in the short-term in light of them. The security problems in Israel are not everything. The social, economic, multi-dimensional problems, are just as serious and deserving of being handled as the security problems. Israeli society is a society of immigrants found in an ongoing process of integration. The internal demographic structure that varies before our eyes is primarily the Jewish population. Israeli society consists of four major population blocs—secular, national-religious, ultra-Orthodox, and non-Jewish minorities (of which the Arab Muslim minority is the largest). This reality compels us to make a huge effort to prevent cracks, and to heal those that are created between the population blocs.

A life story becomes a story only in retrospect. Looking at life events makes it clear that it is impossible to plan the route

that a life will take. One cannot expect, at a young age, where the paths will lead, who will affect you, and what events will be the ones that shape your world. I had the privilege of a fascinating life, one dynamic and full of events.

I first thought of writing a book after the Yom Kippur War. I wrote a personal diary during that war, and in it, I described the war as I saw it, as a relatively young (25 years old) reservist pilot. I shelved the idea, because I felt that it was wrong to judge things as soon as they occurred. As time went on, I found myself once again in uniform, and I felt that it was not proper for me to write a book about my colleagues, with whom I served.

My decision to write came to me while I was studying in the United States in 2007, after leaving the military. In those months on my own, far from home, I thought about my more than forty years of IDF service, as a conscript, a reservist, and in permanent service, around two-thirds of my life; I was personally, directly and indirectly, a participant in extremely significant events in Israel's history. I felt the need, at the very least, to bring them to my family. I shared my thoughts in correspondence with some of my friends. They encouraged me to write and publish, and so, I did.

I began my life as a military man in 1966, before the Six-Day War, in a flight course of the Israeli Air Force. I progressed from being a young fighter pilot in the War of Attrition, through command and staff roles, until I made it to the summit of military service as the IDF Chief of Staff. I participated as a fighter in the War of Attrition (1968-1970), the Yom Kippur War (1973), the First Lebanon War (1982), and in operational activities between the wars and after. I also commanded the IDF in the Second Lebanon War (2006). Over the years, I have been exposed to issues of national security and decision-making at various levels as a subordinate

and as a commander. I found that the “mountains” that I saw while I was young turned into shallow hills as I climbed to the highest positions. I was sent into combat by my commander, and I sent those serving under me into combat. I gained insights and conclusions that are, in my opinion, of interest to everyone for whom the State of Israel is dear. Even if the words written here naturally express my subjective point of view, then they relate to many of my contemporaries, who participated in the same events.

Over the years, I have personally met thousands of people, and have been in the company of tens of thousands. I have always been part of a team, and all of my life I have learned from my mistakes and the mistakes of others. I tried to adopt the saying that it is permitted to err, but it is best not to make the same mistake twice. I saw and felt the heavy price of our independence each time anew with the messages released by the IDF Spokesperson Unit over the deaths of people. Among them were many personal friends of mine, too many. I visited bereaved families, and I saw the pain of our injured. There are no comforting words; no words can ease the pain.

I was brought up all my life to take responsibility, and I tried as best I could to do so. I learned to accept criticism and to criticize. Everyone benefits from constructive criticism. Even in this manuscript, I have criticized people and actions. Some of it comes from pain and from the heart, and some out of concern for our future. I am not made of steel, and I’ve been hurt by the words and actions of people that I’ve been with in the long haul. I did not remain silent when I felt that an injustice had been done. I’m sure that the words that I’ve written will be the object of criticism, which I will then read and learn for the future. I tried my best to be tied to the facts and check each one before putting it down in writing. I apologize in advance if it turns out that I am wrong.

During my long years in the service, I found many loyal friends by my side for the way, people of values and morals who were not too quick to act. I am proud that I belonged to this group of fighters, from all branches of the IDF.

A person's life is incomplete without the people who influence it, because we are all products of the human environment in which we grew up, were brought up, and lived.

I owe a deep gratitude and the person I became to my parents: My father, Moshe Haloutz (z"l), a fighter in the Irgun and in the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the War of Independence, and my mother, Yaffa Haloutz, may she live a long life, who despite hardships of time and place, did not stop even for a moment to be a beloved mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother.

To my brother, Avner, and to my sisters Dalia and Rochma.

To my wife, Irit—the one and only, who has walked by my side for 44 years, through thick and thin. I have always had a strong and intelligent supporter. She did not spare me from piercing and educated comments, which illuminated the long, shared path.

To my children: Tal, Ran, and Yael—our three officers, who were and are the pride of our family's "unit", whose value of quality service of the country is a guide for them.

To my commanders in the Air Force, who gave me the chance to be where I am, who were my role models and listening ears for advice: Gen. Mordechai Hod (z"l), Gen. Binyamin Peled (z"l), Gen. Avihu Ben Nun, Gen. Hartzel Bodinger, Lt. Col. Shmuel Hetz (z"l), and Brig. Gen. Ran Ronen (Pecker).

To President and Air Force Commander Ezer Weizman (z"l), Prime Ministers Yitzhak Rabin (z"l), Ariel Sharon (z"l), Ehud Olmert—I learned from each of them about leadership and decision-making, inspiration and faith.

To my many good friends who have accompanied me through decades of moments of the joy and sorrow, through

the rises and falls of life—classmates, schoolmates, “Beer Forum”—the fighters of the Yom Kippur War from “The One” Squadron, hundreds of my friends from my service in the IAF, in the IDF, and in my life as an ordinary citizen.

Thank you to everyone.

Dani Haloutz  
2016



# INTRODUCTION

On February 14, 2007, I passed on the flag of the Chief of Staff to another native of my *moshav* (a small farming community), Gabi Ashkenazi. This brought an end to forty years and three months of IDF service, most of it in the Air Force, culminating in the positions of Air Force Commander and Chief of Staff. I have always stood as a fighter and loyal son to my country, and from the beginning, I always set goals for high, distant peaks. I arrived to most of them, and I conquered most of them. I learned, I acted, I erred, I investigated, I fixed, and I did it all over again. I have met thousands of people in my life; I tried to reach everyone—I could not, but I reached many. Being close to other people is the source of my energy. I have hurt people in my life, and I regretted it. I gave my full faith to everyone, until the point that they hurt me. I say what I feel, and sometimes I did not know to muzzle my mouth, both in content and the way the words were conveyed.

One day in the winter of 2007, I went to meet Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in his home in Jerusalem. It was one of many meetings that I had had with him after the end of my service. I arrived early, so I called a friend and suggested we meet for a coffee at the coffee shop next door to the Prime Minister's home. We sat down at a table in the back and conversed. "What would you like, sir?" the nice young waitress approached us and inquired. "A strong cappuccino and a glass of soda water", I replied. She turned to leave, but then immediately turned around to us again, asking, "Excuse me, may I ask? You are Mr. Haloutz, right?" "Yes", I replied, "Why do you ask?"

She then told me: “I served in the Air Force as a technical clerk in an F-16 squadron at Hatzor Airbase. One morning, when you were the Air Force Commander, you came to fly your weekly flight in the squadron. You arrived half an hour before the morning briefing. You spent your time by making a cup of coffee, and you went out onto the squadron balcony, where you saw me and joined me. Together, we sat and drank a coffee and smoked a cigarette while we made small talk.” *So what’s so special about that?* I asked myself, and, as if she heard my unspoken question, she continued as if answering me, “You don’t know what it did for me, the Commander of the Air Force sitting alone with the clerk in the squadron and talking to her for a long time. I will never forget it. I felt as if I were just as important as the pilots.” Yes, she and others like her have been and remain just as important as pilots, and sometimes, even more.

When I finished my coffee, I thanked her, wished her success in her academic studies, and left. On my way to the Prime Minister, I thought to myself how much the little things in life, which are seemingly insignificant, can have great meaning and significance, and how important it is to relate to someone at eye level, as equals, as one human being to another.

My decision to retire from the military, after the conclusion of the investigations into the Second Lebanon War, was preceded by much deliberation. I sought advice from a few people who I knew and could trust to keep the conversation private. The decision was not simple, and certainly not easy. At stake were heavy personal and systemic questions. I wrote my resignation letter over and over again, I returned to it and changed it, while choosing my words carefully. I showed it to two of my friends and asked for their opinion. The months that passed after the end of the war until my resignation were physically and mentally packed. I resolved to dig deeply and



comprehensively, while at the same time, drove the work plan to correct the identified deficiencies in the military structure. The imbalance and lack of proportion in the review cried out to the heavens, and the lack of integrity of some of the investigators echoed far and wide. I knew about the under-the-surface subversion of a number of colleagues, both in reserve service and in regular service, but I decided to hold back, not wishing to create any additional turbulence that would hurt the IDF. Sometimes, I felt that knives were digging into my body, even though they were just words. Maya, my secretary, and Yaron, my office manager, felt that things were not as they were before, and kept asking me what I intended to do. Apparently, my body language broadcasted my doubts and deliberations, and afterwards, my decision. I knew that with the decision to resign, I was leaving behind tasks which I undertook but whose implementation I did not complete. However, overall, I think that the act of resigning reflected the correct interpretation of the term “responsibility”. I could have stayed, but it was against my core values.

I suspended my resignation for a week because of the Prime Minister’s trip abroad. Upon his return, and after the conclusions of the investigations of the fighting in Lebanon were presented to the IDF’s top brass, I asked for a personal meeting with the Prime Minister, whose door was always open to me.

I presented the letter to Olmert, told him briefly about the content, and requested that he keep the matter locked away until the completion of a certain task. I asked that he not try to talk me out of it, and to preserve the status between us, because I was determined. Three days later, at one o’clock in the morning of January 17, 2007, I called the Prime Minister. “The special operational activity has been successfully completed, and the announcement of my resignation is coming to light”, I told him.

January 7, 2007

To the honorable

Prime Minister of Israel—Mr. Ehud Olmert

Jerusalem

Sir,

Recently, I have marked forty years of service in the Israel Defense Forces. During this long period, I had the privilege of serving this country, my country of birth, on the loftiest mission of all in my eyes—the defense and security of the State of Israel.

I fought, with my brothers-in-arms, in the IDF in all arenas. Every time that I was summoned for a mission, I did it with a feeling of commitment. I acted with deep thinking in accordance with our values of ethics, loyalty, clean hands, reliability, and friendship.

During my long career in the IDF, I had the privilege to command excellent people, and I saw the IDF progress and develop, thanks to those same people, to capabilities and achievements that have placed it among the leading militaries in the world.

For me, the word “responsibility” is of great significance: it is the essence of everything, from A to Z. My concept of responsibility is what has led me to remain in my position until this moment, and to place this letter on your table today.

On the day that I won the confidence of the government headed by Mr. Ariel Sharon, upon receiving the position of chief of the general staff on June 1, 2005, I accepted a great responsibility.

The essence of this responsibility was reflected in the war in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, and afterwards. When the battle was finished, I decided to realize my responsibility according to the best traditions and values from home and

from my military service. Accordingly, I have ordered the investigation of the combat in a manner unmatched in the history of the IDF: A sharp, deep, and detailed debriefing, which did not pass over my own actions.

Today, after the completion of the debriefing in the IDF, and after an outline has been determined to implement the lessons learned from the debriefing within the framework of the IDF's work plan for 2007, I feel proud that I have completed what I set as my goal with the end of combat in Lebanon, and I have fully realized my responsibility. After these in-depth processes, I trust that the IDF will be prepared for the challenges ahead.

The debriefings made me see what needed to be done in order to fix what needs fixing, and to preserve and improve the areas where we succeeded. One of the central things that we learned from the debriefings is that the IDF system is deeply influenced by long-term processes. Sometimes, the effect is not felt, and we are not aware of the full implications. These processes have an impact on society in general and on overall military capabilities in particular.

The State of Israel is fated, unfortunately for us, to continue to fight for its existence. The ability to ensure our victory in this continuing battle rises and falls with our power. This power, essentially, is built on values, on quality education, on a solid economy, and, above all, on a strong IDF.

The IDF's power is built, first and foremost, on the quality of its personnel, and then on the resources allocated to it to fulfill its mission. We must remember that the IDF's achievements in Lebanon, as well as in other arenas, have been achieved by a large group of fighters and commanders in regular and reserve service, who are ready to be called to the flag at any moment. The IDF's resilience stems from the public support that it enjoys. Regrettably, this area has eroded in recent years.

I believe Mr. Prime Minister that we need to put every effort in guarding the honor and heritage of the IDF, and to leave it outside of political battles.

It is human nature to be reluctant to serve in a system that has no values and is not protected by its dispatchers. We must ensure that we will not reach the point where quality people hesitate to tie their fate and their future to the IDF. If we do, a good education and a strong economy will not be beneficial to us, and there is a danger that the threats against Israel will become more tangible.

The IDF is an extraordinarily moral military. Its heritage is replete with heroic pages, stained with the blood of the many good sons and daughters of the nation who fell along the way. Their memory will accompany me, always.

I hope that we will succeed in a speedy return of the hostages, the POWs and the MIAs to the country for which they fought. In my heart, I will always remember meetings with bereaved families, showing that even in difficult and complicated times, they continue to support the IDF and its commanders.

I am grateful to the defense ministers under whom I have served, and I thank my friends in the IDF General Staff, who were full partners for me, in thought and action. I have within me special gratitude for the IDF commanders and soldiers in the regular and reserve army, and to all of the civilian workers in the IDF who carry out the day-to-day burdens.

Sir, I want to thank you for the support and backing, and I wish you success in dealing with the complex challenges facing the nation, and yourself, as Prime Minister.

In order to lead, we must answer for our responsibilities. Therefore, after having completed my current task at this time, I hereby inform you of my intention to resign my role as Chief of Staff immediately.