

**#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
*THE DEVIL'S HAND***

JACK

CARR

IN THE

A THRILLER

BLOOD

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IN THE BLOOD

A THRILLER

JACK CARR

EMILY BESTLER BOOKS

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ATRIA

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For Michael Goodboe
July 6, 1966–November 24, 2020
Warrior

and

For all those at the Central Intelligence Agency whose lives are
memorialized with stars

For the wages of sin is death.

—ROMANS 6:23

PREFACE

IT IS OFTEN SAID that you don't hear the bullet that kills you, the idea being that the projectile is traveling faster than the speed of sound and therefore a well-placed head shot will put your target in the dirt before the vibrations of the bullet traveling through the atmosphere reach the tympanic membrane. Hence the devastating psychological impact and terror that can be achieved by a single sniper firing one shot and then disappearing into the bush. The enemy never knows when he might be in the crosshairs. He could be drawing breath, full of life, joking with a comrade one second, and gone the next, his soul snatched by an invisible demon behind the scope a mile away.

But this is more than a novel about snipers, more than a thriller about two men hunting each other across the globe. This is a novel of violent resolutions, but also one of forgiveness. At first glance those two themes might seem diametrically opposed, and you would be right. Often, dichotomies help us better understand ourselves and our impact on those around us. There is an advantage in eliminating a targeted individual on the battlefield and there is power in forgiveness. James Reece is a man struggling with those dichotomies.

By the time you read this, Navy SEAL Sniper James Reece may be on screens across the world, brought to life by Chris Pratt in the Amazon Prime Video series adaptation of *The Terminal List*. Why has this character resonated? My suspicion is that it's because he is on a journey, as are we all. And, just like each of us, he strives to learn, to evolve, to apply the wisdom of his experiences to the decisions and the threats of tomorrow. Reece resonates because within each of us there is a warrior and a hunter. It is in our DNA, suppressed by "progress" perhaps, but there nonetheless. Our ancestors were skilled in both disciplines, or we would not be here today. They fought and killed to protect their families and tribes. They hunted to provide sustenance. In more recent times they fought and killed for freedom.

Some critics do not like James Reece. He makes them uncomfortable. I have found that most of those he triggers are the most disconnected from the land and the animals that inhabit it. Putting food on the table is the job of a farmer somewhere between New York and Los Angeles. Many don't feel a responsibility to be prepared to protect their spouses and children when that primal task can be outsourced; just call 911. A moral vanity has trumped the obligation to protect their lives and the lives of those they love; that is the job of the police in a *civilized* society, after all. If that describes you, and you are picking this book up for the first time, perhaps you should put it down. You might not identify with, you might even despise, the protagonist in these pages. Self-reliant men, capable of extreme violence in defense of their lives, their families, and of freedom makes some people nervous.

I quote Robert E. Howard from *The Tower of the Elephant* in my third novel, *Savage Son*: “Civilized men are more discourteous than savages because they know they can be impolite without having their skulls split, as a general thing.”

As a general thing...

I try to be thoughtful in all I do, whether it's the prose in these pages, the research for the novels, a social media post, a question for a guest on my Danger Close Podcast, or an answer to an interview question. I feel an obligation to put the requisite time, energy, and effort into these endeavors, because you, the reader, have trusted me with your time—time you will never get back. I want my character to embody that quality as well. He is thoughtful yet deadly. He is a student of war and of the hunt. He is also searching, searching as we all are, for meaning, for purpose, for a mission. Will that mission always require the gun? Will Reece ever be able to stop killing for God and country? Will he become so disenfranchised by the political machine that he will lay down his weapons and retreat to the mountains of Montana?

In my previous book, *The Devil's Hand*, I explored what the enemy has learned by watching the United States on the field of battle for the previous twenty years at war. I put myself in their shoes. That research led me to believe that if I was a state or non-state adversary, I might just observe for a while; we are doing a good job at tearing ourselves apart from the inside.

In the course of writing this book, I watched the botched withdrawal from Afghanistan in disbelief, although I should not have been surprised—our elected representatives, appointed bureaucrats, and senior level military leaders have a twenty-year track record of failure with almost zero

accountability. They have failed up. Understanding the nature of the conflict in which you are committing or have committed military forces is an essential element of leadership. As President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, “You know, farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you’re a thousand miles from the corn field.” The same is true of warfare; it looks mighty easy when your rifle is a budget approval and you are six thousand miles from the battlefield.

These novels are also extremely therapeutic to write. Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, along with terrorist organizations and super-empowered individuals, certainly give me a lot to work with, but so do those in what Eisenhower coined the “military industrial complex.” It is an ever-growing ecosystem of lobbyists, defense contractors, and flag-level military officers approving budgets in the Pentagon for the very companies they will advise as “members of the board” in retirement. Politicians and their relatives provide ample fodder as well, with elected officials who enter politics making between one hundred and two hundred thousand dollars a year, yet somehow amass wealth in the tens of millions over their tenure in government; aside from being humble public servants, apparently they are also astute investors. Politics is big business.

Is that a system worth serving? Is it one worth saving? Those are questions we must all ask and answer as citizens. As James Reece is pulled closer and closer to the heart of the American intelligence apparatus, they are ones he must ask and answer as well. What will be his answers? How much more power do we, the people, want to relinquish to what was intended to be a limited government? Our employees—elected representatives—rule by the “consent of the governed.” Those in positions of power would be wise to remember that as military and intelligence budgets inch closer to a trillion dollars a year, those investments resulted in two wars lost to insurgents wielding AKs and homemade IEDs working from caves and mud-walled compounds. Today, half the military budget and seventy percent of the intelligence budget goes to contractors. As a wise Marine Corps major general and Medal of Honor recipient once said, “War is a racket.”

James Reece has been a part of that system. He was betrayed by it just as were those who stepped up in service to the nation following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Read *The Afghanistan Papers* by Craig Whitlock for documentation. Reece has also been on the other side, becoming the terrorist, the insurgent, bringing the war home to the front doors of those whose decisions have sent young men and women to their deaths for two decades. Is James Reece now an instrument of those same political elites?

Before he can come to terms with questions of service, sacrifice, and the direction of his future path, Reece has business to attend to. He requires the resources of the very system he despises to put him in position; to get his crosshairs on a sniper, a sniper who is at this very moment also hunting him.

Which brings me back to the bullet that kills you. When it comes to the long-range dance of death, the victor may not always be the shooter most well-versed in the art and science of long-distance engagements. It's a thinking man's game. When two of the most lethal snipers on the planet face off, what will be the differentiator? When given the choice between answers or blood, what will James Reece choose? Turn the page to find out.

Jack Carr
February 16, 2022
Park City, Utah

PROLOGUE

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Africa

SHE HAD BEEN STRIKINGLY beautiful once. At just over forty she still turned heads, a trait she often worked to her advantage both personally and professionally, but even as confident and, more importantly, competent as she was, it was not lost on her that fewer heads were turning these days. She was well aware that her looks had a limited shelf life. She accepted it. She had enjoyed them in her youth but now she had other, more valuable skills—skills she had put into practice hours earlier. As she waited her turn in line at the check-in counter at the Air France section of Thomas Sankara International Airport Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, no one would have guessed that earlier she had shot a man three times in the head with a Makarov 9x18mm pistol.

The Makarov would not have been her first choice but on assignments like this you used what was available. It had worked. The man was dead. The message had been sent.

Aliya Galin brushed her raven-black hair to the side and glanced at her smartphone, not because she wanted to know the time or scroll through a newsfeed or social media app, but because she did not want to stand out to local security forces as what she was, an assassin for the state of Israel. She needed to blend in with the masses, which meant suppressing her natural predatory instincts. It was time to act like a sheep, nonattentive and relatively relaxed. She needed to look normal.

Had she been stopped and questioned, her backstory as a sales representative for a French financial firm would have checked out, as would her employment history, contacts, and references developed by the technical office just off the Glilot Ma'arav Interchange in Tel Aviv, home to the headquarters of the Mossad, the Israeli spy agency tasked with safeguarding the Jewish state. The laptop in her carry-on contained

nothing that would betray her, no secret backdoor files storing incriminating information, no Internet searches for anything to do with Israel, terrorism, or her target. The computer was clean.

It was getting more difficult to travel internationally with the web of interconnected facial recognition cameras that continued to proliferate around the globe. Had it not been for the Mossad's Technology Department she would have been arrested many times over. The Israeli intelligence services had learned the lessons of facial recognition and passport forgery in the age of information the hard way on the international stage twelve years earlier, when twenty-six of their agents had been identified and implicated in the assassination of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in a Dubai hotel room. Al-Mabhouh was the chief weapons procurement and logistics officer for the al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of the Hamas terrorist organization. The Mossad would not repeat the mistakes of Dubai.

Her French passport identified her as Mélanie Cotillard and if someone were to check her apartment in Batignolles-Monceau, they would find a flat commensurate with the income of a midlevel banker in the financial services industry. No disguises, weapons, or false walls would betray her true profession.

The man she had come to kill was responsible for the bombing of a Jewish day care center in Rabat, Morocco. Not all in the Arab world were supportive of Morocco recognizing Israel and establishing official diplomatic relations. If retribution was not swift, it emboldened the enemy, an enemy that wanted to see Israel wiped from the face of the earth. When Iranian-backed terrorists targeted Israeli children, justice was handled not by the courts but by Caesarea, an elite and secretive branch of the Mossad.

More and more, drones were becoming a viable option for targeted assassinations. They were getting smaller and easier to conceal. But, even with the options that came with the increasingly lethal UAV technology, the Mossad still preferred to keep some kills personal. Israel was a country built on the foundation of a targeted killing program, one that had continued to evolve, as did the threats to the nation. There was nothing that put as much fear in the hearts and minds of her enemies as an Israeli assassin.

Though Aliya maintained her dual U.S.-Israeli citizenship, she had not set foot in the United States in almost fifteen years. Israel was now home. Her parents had been born there and had been killed there, a suicide bomber from Hamas taking them from her just as they began to enjoy their retirement years. She had been in the Israel Defense Forces then, doing her

duty with no intention of devoting her life to her adopted homeland. She would be back soon. She would quietly resign from her job in Paris, which had been set up for her by a *Sayan*, and return to Israel. *Sayanim* made up a global network of non-Israeli, though usually Jewish, assets that provided material and logistical support for Mossad operations, not for financial incentives but out of loyalty. Aliya planned to take time off to see her children and her sister who cared for them. She also planned to talk to the head of the special operations division about moving into management. She was getting tired. Perhaps this would be her final kill.

The assignment had been relatively straightforward. She did in fact have a legitimate meeting with a bank in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso's capital city. The instability inherent to the African continent also provided opportunity for investment. Her cover for action intact, she had three days to locate and case the residence of Kofi Kouyaté. They called it a "close target reconnaissance" when she had worked with the Americans in Iraq. She reflected on the operational pace of those intense days often; the lessons learned, the relationships fostered.

Her days of seducing men in hotel bars were in the past, at least in this part of the world. Enough of them had ended up shot, stabbed, poisoned, or blown up after thinking with the small head between their legs that others became wary when a beautiful olive-skinned angel offered to buy them a drink.

The Mossad could have used a hit team of locals on this assignment, but her masters in Tel Aviv still preferred to send a message—hurt Israeli citizens and we will find you, no matter where you hide. Aliya's generation of *Kidon*, assassins, had proven worthy inheritors of the legacy of Operation Wrath of God, which targeted those responsible for the 1972 massacre of Israeli athletes in Munich.

She had worked this job alone. No accomplice to turn her in or identify her to the infamous Burkina Faso internal state security service. If you were rolled up in this part of the world, you could look forward to an interrogation and torture worse than what you would experience in the West Bank. Out here, you would be questioned, beaten, burned, and mutilated before being gang raped until you were dead.

Though security was lax by internationally accepted standards, she still had to empty her purse and small suitcase onto a table beyond a metal detector that she had a strong suspicion was not plugged in. As the two security guards went through her bag, they paid a bit too much attention to her bras and underwear. Finding nothing suspicious that gave them an excuse to bring her into a back room for a secondary search, they let her

proceed to her gate. Perhaps if she were younger they would have crafted an excuse. Aging in this business did have its benefits.

She was looking forward to leaving the African heat behind and settling into her business-class seat on the air-conditioned Air France flight with service to Paris. She was ready for a drink. Air France still took pride in the French part of their lineage and served tolerable white wine even this early in the morning.

Waiting to board, she allowed her mind to wander to the past six months in France, the children she had left in the care of her younger sister in Israel, and a possible return to, no, not normalcy, as life had never been normal for Aliya, but possibly an evolution, yes, that was it, an evolution in her life. Maybe she would visit the United States, travel with her children, and introduce them to the country where she had lived with her parents until they returned to the Holy Land, when Aliya was ten. She smiled, imagining her son and daughter playing on the white sand beaches in the Florida sun. *Normal*. They were still young enough that she could be a mother to them. What would she do at headquarters? Work as an analyst in collections or as an advisor to the chief or deputy director? More appealing was a transfer out of operations and into training. Her hard-earned skills and experience would be put to good use at the Midrasha, the elite Mossad training academy. Would she be able to adjust after all these years in the field? Killing was all she knew.

As she boarded the flight, distracted by thoughts of the future, she failed to notice the man watching her from across the gate.

When she crossed the tarmac and disappeared into the plane, he placed a call.

. . .

Nizar Kattan studied the two men from neighboring Mali as they removed the Strela-2 missiles from the back of the Jeep.

A Soviet-era, shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile, the 9K32 Strela-2 was almost as common in sub-Saharan Africa as RPGs and AK variants. Nizar knew the Strela had been used to successfully shoot down multiple airliners over the years. It was a reliable missile system that had proven its worth, but it was getting old. During the 2002 Mombasa attacks in Kenya that targeted an Israeli-owned hotel, the al-Qaeda inspired terrorists had fired two Strelas at an Israeli-chartered Boeing 747. Both missiles had missed the target. Having worked with enough indigenous talent over the years, Nizar chalked it up to operator error. Still, he wasn't going to take

chances, which is why four of one of the Cold War's most prolific weapons would be used on this mission.

Nizar and his French accomplice had recruited the two patsies from the ranks of Nusrat al-Islam, or Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin to the initiated. The group formed when al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Ansar al-Dine, and al-Mourabitoun merged in 2017. With a mandate that called for killing civilians from Western nations, they would be perfect. Still reverberating with the echoes of French colonial rule, insurgent groups in West Africa were ripe for exploitation. Financial incentives cemented the deal. In this case, Nusrat al-Islam thought they were striking a blow against their European oppressors in an operation organized by Nizar, who they believed to be an al-Qaeda facilitator. Their tasks were simple: They were to transport the four surface-to-air missiles from Mali into Burkina Faso, where they would link up with Nizar and the Frenchman and be given their target. Unbeknownst to them, their other task required them to die.

French special forces soldiers had proven extremely proficient in decimating the ranks of Nusrat al-Islam in Africa. Say what you will of the French, their operators were some of the best in the world. The officials meeting weekly in the Élysée Palace turned a blind eye to French military and intelligence actions in Africa. With few war correspondents covering what was essentially a forgotten conflict, French soldiers targeted and killed with impunity. Most of the developed world cared little for what transpired on the Dark Continent. The French government was smart enough to allow their citizens the freedom to travel, train, and join terror groups abroad. What they were loath to do within their own borders even in the wake of the attacks in Nice and Paris, they were more than happy to do in their former colonies and protectorates, perhaps as a psychological fuck-you to those who had thrown them out in the wars of liberation that swept the continent in the mid to late twentieth century. In Europe, France was a liberal bastion of democratic socialism. Overseas they hunted their enemies with ruthless efficiency.

Jean-Pierre Le Drian was capable and resourceful. His former teammates would have described him as merciless. A former French Foreign Legion *maréchal des logis-chef*, he now found employment as a soldier of fortune, a mercenary with an axe to grind. Rather than face charges for an atrocity in Africa that was too much for even those fighting an expeditionary counterinsurgency, the former staff sergeant was on the run. And he was valuable. He knew just where to look to find black-

market weapons and regional guns for hire in this forgotten corner of Africa.

Le Drian fancied himself a successor to the Waffen SS commandos who escaped Nazi Germany following World War II and found refuge in the Legion, fighting in Indochina in the Devil's Brigade. Were those stories fact or fiction? It didn't matter. Le Drian was guided by the myth. He was his own Devil's Brigade of the new century. He knew that he had done what was necessary. These savages deserved no respect. What was coming next would be easy for him.

Nizar could not care less about the plight of the locals. Africa was just as shitty as the places he had left behind in the Middle East. His assignments in Syria and Ukraine had not been out of allegiance to Allah but out of a desire to leave that world behind. He had feigned support and devotion to *the cause* time and time again, always wondering how those around him could be so naive. Allah didn't care for Nizar. The prophet and the cult that followed him were no different than adherents to any religion the world over, con artists in a protection racket just like he had witnessed in his time with the Bratva, the Russian mafia. Nizar was clear on where real power lay: in the dollar, the euro, the yuan, gold, diamonds, silver, and now bitcoin. Enough of those and you could be a living, breathing god in the flesh.

What Nizar wanted, Allah could not deliver. Praying five times a day in accordance with the Five Pillars only wasted time. His skill with a rifle had been his ticket out of Syria and then to Russia and Montenegro. When his mentor had outlived his usefulness, Nizar had put him down with a shot from a suppressed Stechkin pistol, just as he'd been instructed by his then handler, General Qusim Yedid, a Syrian general who had been found shot in the knee and then poisoned with a highly toxic substance. Nizar had put enough of the story together to conclude that the general's death was the work of James Reece, the man he currently had in his sights. Nizar had escaped to Moscow and into the waiting hands of the Russian mafia before he struck out on his own, finding a home in Montenegro, a way station of illicit trade over millennia. He enjoyed the protection he received there but sensed it was time to move on. *Trust your instincts*. His next kill would allow him to relocate: Thailand, the Philippines, Argentina. He had not decided yet. This last payday, James Reece's death, would make it possible. It would also be his greatest challenge to date, as his prey might at this very moment be hunting him.

Fortunately for Nizar, James Reece was a man with enemies; enemies at senior levels of governments hostile to the United States, governments

with intelligence services that had close ties to proxy terrorist groups. Nizar briefly wondered if the information that had led him to Burkina Faso had originated in Russia or Iran. No matter. It was time to move a pawn on the board. It was time to draw Reece out of the mountains of North America and onto the battlefield.

Nizar closed his eyes and took in the dry morning air. He was ready.

The men were dressed in the uniforms of the Burkina Faso security forces. They had parked off a red dirt road flanked by the long grasses of the savanna. Their position gave them a clear line of sight to aircraft departing Thomas Sankara International Airport.

The retainer money from Eric Sawyer that had been laundered through a construction company in Montenegro was not insignificant, but it was not quite enough. The former Army Ranger and private military company CEO had used Nizar to eliminate problems. He had died under suspicious circumstances on his island property in the West Indies, but not before he had set up a contract to eliminate James Reece. Was the CIA involved in Sawyer's death? Nizar could not be sure, but he had his suspicions. Had the retainer been a few more million, Nizar would have considered taking the money and not fulfilling the contract. With Sawyer dead, there would have been no repercussions. Perhaps if he were not on Reece's radar, Nizar would have walked. But he was. Nizar suspected that Reece had killed two of Nizar's past handlers. The former SEAL was a threat, one that needed to be dealt with. Putting him in the ground solved two problems: It eliminated an exceptionally competent professional targeting him and it unlocked the other half of Sawyer's money, allowing Nizar to disappear and to not have to go for his gun every time he caught movement in the shadows. If he was going to vanish and leave this life behind, he needed to kill James Reece.

The Frenchman had come to him courtesy of his new handler, the man in the wheelchair. They had met in person only once, in Dubrovnik. The coastal Croatian city was close enough to Montenegro that Nizar could make the trip with relatively few complications. His potential handler, on the other hand, had to travel by train and ferry from Turin, in northern Italy, to the Balkan state on the Adriatic. Nizar had watched him over the course of four days, looking for signs of surveillance. The man in the wheelchair was a veteran of the game; he knew Nizar was observing and vetting him. He was a professional and would have expected nothing less. Nizar found himself grudgingly gaining respect for the small man who pushed himself through the streets and hauled himself in and out of taxis and into restaurants and cafés without asking for help or letting a

moment's worth of self-pity cross his face. The man wore a different tailored suit every day, a bold silk ascot around his neck. Like Nizar, he stayed off cell phones and computers. He was a student of the old school. How he ended up in the wheelchair was a source of mystery and conjecture to those who lived and worked in the darker side of the clandestine economy. It was rumored he had been put there by a sniper.

Having established that the man was not bait, Nizar sat down with him over coffee, and they worked out their arrangement. Without Sawyer he needed someone else who could navigate the underworld, acquire weapons, and find additional talent. Additional talent would be necessary on this job. His one and only in-person meeting with his new handler had felt like a job interview, the small man confined to the chair studying him with those hawklike eyes, judging, assessing.

Nizar needed a partner on this mission, one with language abilities and a high level of martial prowess; the man in the wheelchair had delivered. If James Reece was as good as his track record would suggest, a second set of eyes and another scoped rifle in the fight would pay dividends.

Le Drian glanced at his watch and barked at the two "soldiers." When operating in this part of the world it helped to have a French citizen on your side who also spoke Arabic and Mòoré. That he boasted a background in the French Foreign Legion, operating almost exclusively in Africa, made him worth the investment. That he had a beef with the French government only helped solidify his allegiance.

"Just a few more minutes," the Frenchman said in flawless Arabic.

"Unless they are delayed," Nizar responded.

"Yes, always a probability in this part of the world. *This is Africa*, after all."

"Are they ready?" Nizar asked.

"Yes. They think they are making a statement, killing the colonial invaders, which, as you know, appeals to me."

Le Drian could never set foot in France again, banned to the outer reaches of what had once been an empire. Even the French Foreign Legion had standards. Hunting and killing were one thing, torture was another; the memory of Algeria had yet to fade.

"Get ready," Nizar said. "Confirm the tail number and—"

The phone in the Frenchman's pocket chirped. He spoke in Mòoré and hit the End button.

"She's on board. Plane is taxiing."

"Good. It is time."

. . .

Aliya leaned back in her seat and took a sip of wine. It was just after 9:00 a.m.

The plane gained speed and lifted off, clearing the buildings at the east end of the runway and making a slow turn over the capital city.

The mission was *never* over. Not now. Not when she landed in France. Not when she returned to Israel. Not ever. This was a war and she was a combatant, something that was driven home in Iraq when the Mossad had detailed her to the Central Intelligence Agency. Her dual U.S.-Israeli citizenship allowed her to liaise between the Mossad and CIA on matters pertaining to the state of Israel. She missed those days. She missed *that* mission. It was straightforward. She missed the people she had worked with. She missed one in particular.

As the aircraft banked northward and gained altitude, she looked through her window. The buildings turned to huts; the semi-paved road of the capital morphed to red dirt and then to the grasses of the African plains. She wondered how long it would take them to find the man she had killed.

Had she not been a trained intelligence officer she might not have taken note of the green Jeep and faded purple van that stood out in contrast to the light brown grasses that surrounded them. At this low altitude she could still discern the outline of four men looking up at the gigantic plane headed for Europe. Had she not been on the receiving end of RPGs and Katyusha rockets, she might have mistaken the four flashes for the glint off a windshield or perhaps a deformity in the thick plastic window at her shoulder. But she *was* a trained intelligence officer and she *had* been on the receiving end of enemy rockets and missiles.

She thought of her two children. She thought of her husband, who had preceded her in death. She closed her eyes.

Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness, I fear no harm, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort...

For the briefest of moments, she wondered if she was the intended target and just before the first missile impacted the fuselage, she determined that was the only logical conclusion. She was responsible for the innocent lives on the plane: mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, children, and grandparents, who would never take another breath. She wondered who had betrayed her and she went to her death with the weight of one hundred and twenty-eight additional souls on her already troubled conscience.

PART ONE

ALIYA

THE OPERATIVE

FOR BY WISE GUIDANCE YOU CAN WAGE YOUR WAR.
—PROVERBS 24:6 AND FORMER MOTTO OF THE MOSSAD