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## **What is Victory?**

**Shmuel Harlap**

**The essence of “victory” can be understood as a state of resolve. Beyond this proposed definition, it is necessary to distinguish between two manifestations of victory: subjective or objective. Subjective victory is cognitive, and always subject to individual judgment. Objective victory is factual and thus is subject to a factual state of affairs. “Victory image” is a concept that is shared by subjective victory and objective victory, but at the same time, blurs the distinction between them. Images of objective victory are “invisible hand” images: they arise from the anonymous mechanism of the market economy and are processed into victory images for which the market has “voted with its feet.” In contrast, images of subjective victory are “hidden hand” images: they are carefully selected in a hidden process that is presented as “authentic,” and are aimed at the weak spot of public opinion, at home and abroad. Wars are won through objective victories. Victory images in military triumphs are not on demand; they burst forth into the media via the market mechanism of the invisible hand. No one guides or regulates them, there is no hidden hand that issues them, and they reflect the authentic truth of victory and defeat.**

The General Staff of the IDF recently dedicated four days to a “victory workshop” convened by Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi. “As always, the question was, and is, what is victory and who defines it, and they didn’t answer this in the workshop” (*Haaretz*, April 16, 2019).

The essence of “victory” can be understood as a state of resolve. Beyond this proposed definition, it is necessary to distinguish between two manifestations of victory: subjective or objective. Subjective victory is cognitive, and always subject to individual judgment. Objective victory is factual and thus is subject to a factual state of affairs, not to judgment.

The distinction between subjective victory and objective victory is demonstrated in the distinction between victory by knockout and victory by points. In boxing matches, victory by points is subjective, because it is subject to the judge’s decision. The judge awards points to each boxer at the end of each round. At the end of the match, the judge declares the winner based on the number of points that each side has received. In

contrast, a victory by knockout does not require a judge's decision. The defeated adversary is stretched out on the floor, the referee counts to ten, and if the boxer does not stand up on his feet, the match has ended with a knockout victory.

Another example is the distinction between weightlifting and bodybuilding. Both require intensive exertion of muscles. Victory in bodybuilding competitions is subjective: the panel of judges awards points to each bodybuilder, and the bodybuilder who receives the most points is declared the winner. In contrast, in a weightlifting competition, what determines victory is the weight that the athlete lifts, not the judge's opinion. Objective victory is not only factual; it is also quantitative and measurable. Indeed, Olympic medals in every sport are awarded based on measurable achievements.

Objective victory is also common in politics and the economy. In Western democracies, objective victory is achieved by winning the elections based on the number of votes and the seats earned in a parliamentary system, or by direct election in a presidential system. In the economic realm, objective victory is achieved when technological disruption becomes a lethal weapon that destroys the old economy and replaces it with a new economy. Thus, the electric lightbulb replaced the candle and oil lamp industry, the car replaced horse and buggy transportation, email replaced letters, and the smartphone replaced the cell phone, which had previously supplanted the landline. Today, technological breakthroughs mark the objective victory of the digital world over the analog world.

In contrast, subjective victory, being cognitive, is subject to a wide range of maneuvering options: negotiation, propaganda, marketing, intrigues, manipulations, and the creation of coalitions to agree on a winner. For example, the selection of the pope, Nobel Prize recipients, and Oscar winners all involve negotiation among a panel of judges, whether by secret ballot "until white smoke emerges," or by giggles from the panel of judges in reality television competitions, such as "Dancing with the Stars" or "MasterChef."

The military realm is no different, and likewise sports the distinction between subjective and objective victory. Subjective victory is cognitive, "seared consciousness," as defined by Lt. Gen. (ret.) Moshe "Bogie" Ya'alon. In contrast, objective victory in a military campaign depends on destroying the enemy's forces. In a land campaign, destroying the enemy's forces involves taking control of territory and conquering it. In a maritime campaign, there is no territory that can be conquered, and thus the substitute for territory in the ocean is navigating and supply routes. In a marine campaign, military victory involves destroying the enemy's fleet and gaining control over its sailing and supply routes. Objective victory on the battlefield has no need of "seared consciousness";

destroying the enemy's forces, conquering territory, or taking over navigating routes are the definitive proof of objective victory.

In Israel's wars, the War of Independence, the Sinai Campaign in 1956, and the Six Day War in 1967 were wars that ended in an objective victory on the battlefield. In all three, enemy forces were destroyed, the IDF took control of territory, and the facts on the ground spoke for themselves. The military victory did not require interpretation. It was victory by knockout: "quick, strong and elegant," as stated by Lt. Gen. Haim Bar-Lev before the Six Day War.

In contrast, the Yom Kippur War (1973), the Lebanon Wars – in 1982 and in 2006 – and all of the campaigns between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip – Operations Cast Lead, Pillar of Defense, and Protective Edge (2008-9, 2012, and 2014, respectively) – were wars and campaigns of subjective victories: each side looked for and marketed its public "victory images." Each side tried to recruit judges from local and international public opinion and media that would award it victory by points, or follow the example of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who appointed himself as the judge and successfully marketed the crossing of the canal.

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A victory image is always a photograph: the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima in Japan by the marines, Japan's surrender ceremony on the *USS Missouri* on September 2, 1945, the raising of the Israeli flag that was drawn in ink at Um Rush Rush in the War of Independence, the picture of the paratroopers at the Western Wall after the conquest of the Old City of Jerusalem in the Six Day War, and the cover of *Life* magazine in which Yossi Ben Hanan is seen raising a Kalashnikov in the water of the Suez Canal. However, a victory image is also the photo of the Israeli captives on the banks of the canal in the Yom Kippur War, and the picture of the disabled Palestinian in a wheelchair on the Gaza border who was shot by Israeli snipers.

Given that all the above are examples of victory images, we need to separate carefully between images of objective victory and images of subjective victory.

In his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, American philosopher Robert Nozick distinguishes astutely between two types of interpretation or explanation of events: the theory of the "invisible hand," from the teaching of Adam Smith, and the theory of the "hidden hand." An "invisible hand" interpretation explains that what seems to be the product of someone's intentional prior plan is actually not at all so. According to Smith,

each person acts to increase his happiness and wealth, but the result is that everyone profits without anyone having intended this. This is the “invisible hand” behind the mechanism of the market.

In contrast, and in complete contradiction to the invisible hand explanation, the “hidden hand” explanation of events in reality is that what seems to be an unconnected coincidence without a guiding hand is in fact the product of a hidden, prior plan by a guiding force. “Hidden hand” explanations all have two sides of the same coin. On one side, all conspiracy theories are “hidden hand” explanations and are baseless concoctions. On the other side, all the instances of fake news regarding foreign interference in elections in democratic countries, as well as the use of bots in order to manipulate public opinion, are a real, provable “hidden hand” explanation. Technology and social media exacerbate both sides of the hidden hand coin.

How does Nozick’s analysis between “invisible hand” and “hidden hand” explanations help distinguish between subjective victory and objective victory?

The victory images of the Six Day War – the paratroopers at the Western Wall and Yossi Ben Hanan in the Suez Canal – are “invisible hand” images. The editors of *Life* magazine and those who immortalized the picture of the paratroopers at the Western Wall chose pictures that in their view best expressed the military victory from among hundreds or perhaps thousands of alternatives. None of them planned in advance that the paratroopers would be photographed at the Western Wall or that Ben Hanan would jump into the water of the canal. The war photo market distilled what seemed to be the strongest visual expressions of the victory.

In contrast, the images of the Israeli captives with their hands up that appeared in the Egyptian and Syrian press and the picture of the disabled amputee who was shot by an IDF sniper are “hidden hand” images. The Egyptian leadership celebrated the Egyptian victory by presenting the Israeli captives as a victory image of crossing the canal. Hamas pushed the disabled man to the line of fire in the hope that he would be photographed and become a propaganda weapon. How happy were the heads of Hamas when it turned out to their amazement that they had received an extremely moving image of a disabled man clutching his dead body, killed by the bullets of the “Zionist enemy.”

Thus, images of objective victory are “invisible hand” images: they arise from the anonymous mechanism of the market economy and are processed into victory images for which the market has “voted with its feet.” In contrast, images of subjective victory are “hidden hand” images: they are carefully selected in a hidden process that is presented as “authentic,” and are aimed at the weak spot of public opinion, at home and abroad.

As such, the difference between images of subjective vs. objective victory is not the visual presentations of the images, but rather the mechanism that produces them. The mechanism that produces images of objective victory is the market mechanism. It is no coincidence that the most famous victory image of the Six Day War, Ben Hanan in the water of the canal, is from an American magazine. Some editor at *Life*, not involved, and apparently not even at the scene, selected it. In contrast, the mechanism that produces images of subjective victory is always that which is in power: the Egyptian leadership in the Yom Kippur War, or Hamas, or in Israel, the image that more than any other symbolizes the government's attempt to market a subjective victory in the catastrophe of the Yom Kippur War: the bandaged head of General Ariel Sharon.

From the Yom Kippur War until today, the Israeli side's war images have been videos that the IDF Spokesperson has released to the media: from the aerial assassination of Hamas leader Ahmed Jabari in the opening strike of Operation Pillar of Defense to the "hundreds of high-quality targets" that were hit in the Gaza Strip in recent Air Force sorties. The more the IDF Spokesperson reiterated in a monotone voice which hundreds of high-quality targets were hit, the more his credibility eroded, seemingly in direct proportion to the number of "high-quality targets" destroyed.

The production of "victory images" was officially institutionalized with the establishment of the IDF Spokesperson Unit's Operational Documentation Division in 2012, following Operation Pillar of Defense. The division's photographers are defined as "operational documenters" and are attached to every infantry battalion. The need for operational documentation does not necessarily indicate a hidden intention to produce "victory images." However, the fact that the division is subordinate to the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, whose job is advocacy and media warfare, and not to a body responsible for investigations, monitoring, and lessons learned, points the spotlight on the swamp of victory images "on someone's behalf."

Wars are won through objective victories. Victory images in military triumphs are not on demand; they burst forth into the media via the market mechanism of the invisible hand. No one guides or regulates them, there is no hidden hand that issues them, and they reflect the authentic truth of victory and defeat: one side is stricken and stretched out helpless on the ground, while the victors lay down their weapons and sit down for lunch.

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