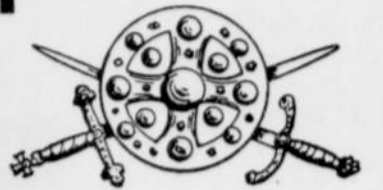
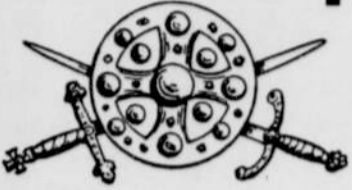


THE WHITE FLAG PRINCIPLE

HOW TO LOSE A WAR & WHY



BY SHIMON TZABAR

"...traditionally war was the only way in which one nation, in need of money, could obtain it from another. There is no more profitable and sound a step for a nation without money or credit to take, than declare war ...and suffer a total defeat. We declare war on Monday, are vanquished on Tuesday, and rehabilitated beyond our wildest dreams by Friday night."

—LEONARD WIBBERLEY
(The Mouse That Roared)

War was, and still is, the most important event in the history of mankind. It is the womb that bears fortunes and misfortunes, hopes and disappointments, life and death. It creates and destroys tribes, nations, kingdoms and empires. "War is the father of all things," says Heraclitus.

It is not surprising that the human mind is so obsessed by war. Reflections of this obsession find their way into every human activity — into philosophy, into the arts, into science, into social structures and political organizations. The concept of war dominates the human mind to such an extent that, as L.C. Lewin wrote in *Report From Iron Mountain*, "The dualism that characterized the traditional dialectic of all branches of philosophy and of stable relationships stems from war as the prototype of conflict. Except for secondary considerations, there cannot be, to put it as simply as possible, more than two sides to a question, because there cannot be more than two sides to a war." The best brains have tried to understand war; to study it, analyze and inspect it in order to discover the rules by which it operates. However, war has been studied not just for the sake of knowledge, but for the sake of winning a victory. The study of war has been for the most part the search for the key to victory. Nothing else has been held important or even significant. The blood, the fire, the pain and the misery have not just been ignored; they have been justified and glorified because if manipulated properly they have led to victory. "Victory at all costs," said Churchill: "Victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival."

What Churchill said to one people about one particular war has been true for all wars and all combatants. Victory was the ultimate goal, shared historically and psychologically by all members of the human species. "Military glory! It was a dream that century after century had seized on men's imaginations and set their blood on fire," wrote Cecil Woodham Smith. "Trumpets, plumes, charges, the pomp of war, the excitement of combat, the exultation of victory — the mixture was intoxicating indeed. To command great armies, to perform deeds of valor, to ride victorious through flower-strewn streets, to be heroic, magnifi-

cent, famous — such were the visions that danced before men's eyes as they turned eagerly to war."

The desire to be victorious was so elementary and obvious, that when Clausewitz wrote a classic on the subject he called it *On War*. A more accurate title would be *On Victory*. He assumed automatically that the two were coterminous, indeed identical.

Are they really identical?

War can be described as a one-dimensional process in time. It is preceded by a *prewar* situation and followed by a *postwar* situation. There are two possible outcomes of war and two possible postwar situations. The outcomes are defeat or victory; the postwar situations are good or bad. It is taken for granted that a good postwar situation is the result of victory, the bad the result of defeat. This might be true if the factors that lead an army to victory were the same as those that create a better postwar situation. As it is, the factors are not the same and therefore it does not necessarily follow that victory results in a good postwar situation; and defeat in a bad one.

Germany and Japan, the most heavily defeated parties in the last World War, emerged better off and had a much better postwar situation than Britain and France, the victorious parties. The same is true of modern China, which had been defeated continually in the last few hundred years, and of Russia, which suffered perpetual defeats from the beginning of the 20th century to 1942, when the invading German army started to collapse under the weight of its own victories.

The advantages of defeat are many. They can be cultural, social, economic and even military. When the Second World War broke out Japan was a socio-economic monster — a hybrid of a feudal society and a modern economy. If Japan had won the war, this monster would have grown bigger. In the end, it would have destroyed its own people. Since the monster was a result of 1,000 years of continual victories, it could be destroyed only by defeat. Two atom bombs — one on Hiroshima and one on Nagasaki — did it. The defeat delivered Japan from its abnormality. It had a beneficial effect on the economy, on the life, on the arts, on everything.

Similar things can be said about Germany. Her triumph during the French financial crisis of November 1986, when the economy and monetary system of all the Western World was dependent upon the deutchmark, was but the peak of an unbroken range of economic miracles. This was only one of the advantages the Germans derived from their defeat. If Germany had been victorious, the Germans would have had to carry on under the Nazi yoke of Hitler and his gang, which would have been fatal to Germany no less than the rest of the world. If

Germany had won, the economic miracle would have been impossible. If the Germans had won, they would have had to keep their army in distant foreign countries and pay for the upkeep of that army with their economic progress. In short, they would have had to suffer what France and Britain, the victors, suffered for decades after the war.

And who is more experienced in defeat than the Jewish people? They have been the world's professional vanquished for almost 2,000 years. It is hardly possible to mention a defeat, a surrender or a debacle which they have not suffered. And yet they have survived all their victors. Where are the ancient kingdoms that destroyed Israel? Where are the Egyptians and the Babylonians, where are the Greeks, where are the Romans who burned down their Temple? They are all dead now, vanished from the political map. It is the defeated Jews who are here with enough vigor in their old bones to start afresh from the beginning.

The view that the best outcome of war can only be the result of victory has been common. Nevertheless, there have been a few who suspected it might not be so.

The best known example is that of King Pyrrhus, who said to his friends when they congratulated him on his victory over the Romans: "Yes, but if we have another victory, we are undone." A similar idea was expressed by Belisarius while defending and expanding Justinian's Byzantine empire. When his soldiers urged him to attack the king of the Saracens, who was moving along the Euphrates with the aim of pouncing upon Antioch, he answered: "True victory lies in compelling one's opponent to abandon his purpose with the least possible loss to oneself. If such a result was obtained, there was no real advantage to be gained by winning a battle." Samuel Rogers quotes the Duke of Wellington as saying after Waterloo: "The next greatest misfortune to losing a battle is to gain such a victory as this."

The quotations from King Pyrrhus and the Duke of Wellington express a surprise that experience does not tally with what is commonly believed to be true. Belisarius' answer shows more than that. It shows that this outstanding general realized that victory is not at all necessary for the achievement of aims.

In our own times, this approach was followed by the noted exponent of the indirect approach in strategy, Captain B. H. Liddell Hart. He was unique in the military profession in that he questioned the role of victory on the battlefield.

"The object in war," wrote Liddell Hart, "is a better state of peace — even if only from your point of view. Hence it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire. History shows that gaining military victory is not in itself

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