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What constitutes victory in a war?
The case of Operation Protective Edge

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Abstract

The ways in which we fight wars today has changed with the technological advances and changing political landscapes. This raises the question if our understanding of 'victory' in a war has evolved sufficiently to be applicable and valid in cases of asymmetrical or hybrid warfare. Victory is a contentious and provocative term, but it has the capacity to influence the destiny of nations, shape future behavior of states, offer resolutions and credibility and much more.

This dissertation focuses on the understandings and perceptions of the term 'victory' in an asymmetrical war. The case study employed to help illustrate the complexities of defining and determining 'victory' and 'defeat' in a war, is the 2014 Gaza War between Israel and Hamas. Both sides claimed victory, despite lacking the metrics in 'accurately' assessing their winnings.

This paper concludes that Israel indeed achieved its war aims, whereas Hamas failed. However, this does not mean that Israel 'won' the war and that Hamas 'lost' it. Hamas was still able to convince its public of victory, despite all physical evidence to the contrary. As a result, defining and determining victory remains largely contested, regardless of what metrics one employs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

While there is an abundance of literature on the causes and consequences of war, comparatively limited scholarly work exists on assessing 'victory' in a war. Ongoing debates among scholars focus on the challenges of conceptualizing war in the twenty-first century, in terms of what it is and what it involves. As a result, the determination of war-related phenomena, such as 'victory' and 'defeat', is equally contested.[1] With the ever-evolving wartime environments, scholars and policymakers face major problems in defining the very meaning of 'victory', which, in turn, causes serious difficulties in assessing victory and defeat in modern warfare. According to Leo Blanken and Jason Lepore, wartime assessment, at its most basic level, answers questions of whether we are winning or not.[2] However, the issue becomes more complex once one tries to establish what type of war is being fought and which aspects of war should be assessed.

This dissertation focuses on the understandings and perceptions of the term 'victory' in an asymmetrical war. The introductory chapter reviews the traditional understanding of victory, examines the challenges it poses with regard to modern war and explores various approaches that may help to define 'victory' in an asymmetrical war and to determine its extent. The chapter then briefly introduces the case study employed to illustrate the problem of determining 'victory' in a modern asymmetrical war: the 2014 Gaza War between Israel and Hamas, the ruling Palestinian group in the Gaza Strip. The second chapter explores the Israeli narrative of this war, known as 'Operation Protective Edge' in Israel, and assesses the nature of

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[1] Benjamin Most and Harvey Starr, "Conceptualizing "War": Consequences for Theory and Research," in *War*, Vol. 1, ed. Paul Diehl (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), 42.
[2] Leo Blanken, Hy Rothstein, and Jason J. Lepore, ed., *Assessing War: The Challenge of Measuring Success and Failure* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015), xi.

its claim to victory. The third chapter investigates Hamas' account of the conflict and analyzes its assertion to have won the war. The dissertation concludes that Israel indeed achieved its war aims, whereas Hamas failed. However, this does not mean that Israel 'won' the war in the traditional sense, and that Hamas 'lost' it. Due to the complexities of victory, it is not as straightforward. Hamas was still able to convince its public of victory, despite all physical evidence to the contrary. Thus, defining and determining victory remains largely contested, regardless of what metrics one employs.

It is of great importance to establish clearly who emerges as a 'winner' and a 'loser' from a war, because of the straightforward implications this has for post-conflict reconstruction and future policies. Claiming victory helps rally support from the public, as it becomes easier to justify past actions as well as future undertakings. Similarly, admission of defeat makes it more acceptable to bear the potentially negative consequences of the aftermath. In essence, a simple 'victor-loser' nexus is far more efficient in communicating messages to the public and the outside world, since the general public better understands simple dichotomies rather than the complex realities of victory and defeat in a war.

It is generally acknowledged that our understanding of warfare has changed throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, our insights concerning 'victory' have often failed to change with it.[3] Consequently, when do we know when a war has been won? Who decides who has won a war, and what criteria should be employed to determine the victory? The traditional three-tiered typology of victory in war —tactical,

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[3] Gal Beckerman, "In modern warfare, what does victory mean?" *The Boston Globe*, January 26, 2013, accessed February 15, 2017, https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2013/01/26/modern-warfare-what-does-victory-mean/O7NUJmxrz2sg4IsuZWSGJL/story.html.

operational and strategic[4] — may no longer universally apply in the analysis of asymmetrical or hybrid wars. Most modern wars lack the measurable results of traditional conflicts in terms of territory taken or lost, casualty ratios, prisoners captured or similarly quantifiable aspects.

The challenges of defining and determining victory in a war

The central challenge for scholars and policymakers is to determine clearly and precisely what constitutes victory in modern warfare and what it means for the state involved in a war. Defining the concept of 'victory', J. Boone Bartholomees states, is one of the foremost theoretical issues facing security experts today.[5] This problem is exacerbated by the ambiguous meaning of the term. As Jean Bethke Elshtain puts it, words such as 'war' and 'victory' have certain connotations and are often found not to be neutral.[6] As a result, it is exceptionally difficult to provide an objective assessment of victory due to the inherent subjectivity of this paradigm.

To be sure, there are different 'levels' of war and thus different 'levels' of victory. Short-term victories are distinctly different from transformative victories, and a clear-cut strategic victory brings obvious long-term advantage to the victor while diminishing the enemy's war-making capabilities.[7] However, as Cian O'Driscoll has pointed out, modern warfare rarely produces a clear-cut victory.[8] With the new asymmetrical or hybrid types of wars, including the fighting of terrorist organizations, how

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[4] J. Boone Bartholomees, "Theory of Victory," *The US Army War College Quarterly Parameters* 38, (2008): 27.

[5] Ibid., 25.

[6] Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Terrorism," in *The Price of Peace: Just War in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Charles Reed and David Ryall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118.

[7] William C. Martel, *Victory in War: Foundations of Modern Strategy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 25.

[8] Cian O'Driscoll, "At all costs and in spite of all terror? The victory of just war," *Review of International Studies* 41, (2015): 802.

can it be determined whether victory has been won? There may be no clear entity to surrender, no way to stipulate terms of peace, and none of the standard repertoire of war making between states. Modern conflicts are, in fact, likely to be open-ended affairs that do not lead to the achievement of 'victory' in the traditional sense. It is more likely that 'victory' will come to be understood as 'reasonable success' or incremental achievement, rather than an all-out, clear-cut military defeat of the enemy.[9]

In light of the challenges facing the concept of 'victory' highlighted above, some form of assessment of war should be agreed upon before the conflict begins. However, whatever form of assessment is adopted, it must be flexible and adaptable enough to be adjusted if the political goals of the campaign shift, since this would require new measurements for determining if and when the goals are achieved. Thus, one might suggest that, instead of focusing on the results of a war in terms of grand strategies, it may be more appropriate to concentrate on the concrete objectives and war aims of the conflicting parties in defining and determining the extent of 'victory'. If the objectives, as set out at the beginning of the military confrontation or modified during the campaign are accomplished, one may conclude that 'victory' has been achieved. This presupposes, of course, that war aims, as stipulated by the parties at the outset of the conflict or modified during the campaign, are clear, realistic and achievable. Without clear goals, it is impossible to perform an assessment; without realistic goals, assessment becomes useless, since unrealistic goals cannot be achieved.[10]

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[9] Elshtain, "Terrorism," 118.
[10] Anthony Cordesman and Hy Rothstein, "Can we learn from the assessment of war?" in *Assessing War: The Challenge of Measuring Success and Failure*, ed. Leo Blanken, Hy Rothstein and Jason J. Lepore (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 319.

Alternatively, some scholars, such as Eric Patterson, have suggested focusing on post-conflict metrics of victory, rather than assessing victory during the military campaign.[11] True victory, they would argue, only comes with the establishment of a sustainable peace. Traditionally, scholars and policymakers focus on how to achieve military victory and often neglect the 'peace-winning' process. As a result, the least studied aspect of war is how wars end, and how difficult it is to achieve a stable and a secure transition to peace. Not only do scholars and policymakers face problems in identifying victory in a war, but they also encounter a number of challenges during the post-conflict phase, such as questions over legitimacy, authority and responsibility at a war's end.[12]

With all the attempts by scholars and policymakers to define the meaning of 'victory' in war, one should also be aware, however, of the potential danger in attempting to reduce wartime assessment to a simple set of lessons. As Anthony Cordesman and Hy Rothstein point out, war, in fact, is case specific and extremely complex. Trying to find an easy and straightforward form of assessment, narrative or metrics, they point out, may just add to the confusion of war and victory rather than reducing it.[13]

To some degree, therefore, Bartholomees may be right when he refuses to provide an all-inclusive definition of victory. In a rather pragmatic approach, he considers 'victory' in a war, at its most fundamental level, as not a fact or a condition. Instead, he argues quite convincingly that it is an individual's opinion or a combination of opinions. Ultimately, Bartholomees maintains, what matters most with regard to victory is the perception of the situation, not the facts. Winning a war is a political condition, and victory is defined in political terms. Consequently, different

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[11] Beckerman, "In modern warfare, what does victory mean?"
[12] James T. Johnson and Eric D. Patterson, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Military Ethics* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 69.
[13] Cordesman and Rothstein, "Assessment of war?" 320.

people, groups or states, depending on their standpoints, may differ in their assessments, and they may all have some valid points.[14] A case in point with regard to fundamentally contrasting perceptions of victory is provided by the respective claims on the part of Israel and Hamas of the outcome of the 2014 Gaza War.

The 2014 Gaza War (Operation Protective Edge)

One of the fundamental beliefs in the Israeli narrative is that the Jewish state is uniquely threatened due to its historic vulnerability, its identity as a religious nation located in historically disputed territory, and the fact that so many of its neighbors refuse to recognize its right to exist.[15] Israel's concerns over its national security plays a fundamental role in how its military operations are conducted. In the summer of 2014, Israel led a military campaign in Gaza known as Operation Protective Edge.[16] Carried out from 8 July until 26 August, Israel's campaign against Hamas and other terrorist organizations was the third major operation in Gaza within less than six years. Euphemistically described as 'mowing the lawn', Israel's periodic offensives against Hamas were meant to ensure that the military capabilities of the Palestinian militants in Gaza were each time sufficiently reduced so as to no longer present a serious threat to its people.

Protective Edge was characterized by different operational phases that intended to achieve different objectives. The conflict was an asymmetrical war, in which Hamas fought with unconventional methods, from suicide bombings inside Israel to cross-border raids, and from rocket attacks to

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[14] Bartholomees, "Theory of Victory," 26.

[15] Martin Cook, "The Role of the Military in the Decision to Use Armed Force," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Military Ethics*, ed. James T. Johnson and Eric D. Patterson (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 69.

[16] State of Israel, *The 2014 Gaza Conflict, 7 July – 26 August 2014: Factual and Legal Aspects* (Jerusalem: State of Israel, 2015), 2.

mortar launches aimed at Israel's civilian population.[17] Israel, for its part, embarked on limited military operations in Gaza to restore peace and security for its citizens.

At the conclusion of the war, both Israel and Hamas claimed victory and asserted that they had achieved their war aims. The following two chapters will analyze and assess these claims and, in the process, look at some concrete instances illustrating the tremendous challenges in defining and determining the extent of victory in an asymmetrical war.

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[17] Ibid., 1.

Chapter 2: Israel and Operation Protective Edge

The 2014 Gaza War, also known in Israel as Operation Protective Edge, lasted for 51 days, from 8 July until 26 August.[18] It was by far the most lethal and devastating military operations to have been carried out by Israel against Hamas. The repercussions of Protective Edge were destructive, with 74 Israelis killed, 2,200 Palestinian fatalities and 500,000 Palestinians displaced. During the Gaza campaign, 4,258 rockets were fired at Israel, of which 735 were intercepted by Israel's defensive system 'Iron Dome'; Israel launched 5,226 air strikes and destroyed 32 of Hamas' tunnels, which constituted a large part of the organization's extensive underground network.[19] After the war ended with a ceasefire agreement, both sides claimed victory. However, many contested opinions prevail regarding who actually won the war. In addition, there is also an intense debate on the extent of the victory claimed by either side.

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate Israel's victory claims and to determine the degree of its victory after Protective Edge. In order to assess the Israeli narrative in the most comprehensible way possible, official statements made by high level representatives are used in combination with academic findings of the war. The chapter is broken down into subsections, where Israel's objectives are discussed first. The next section addresses Israel's victory statements and is followed by a discussion on the extent of Israel's achievement of its proclaimed war aims. Lastly, the aftermath of Protective Edge is examined in a wider Israeli perspective, concluding that Israel achieved its short-term war aims by restoring relative peace and security to its citizens. However, as will be illustrated,

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[18] Michael Thomas, "Operation Protective Edge: The War Crimes Case Against Israel's Leaders," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, October 26, 2015, accessed June 19, 2016, http://www.merip.org/mero/mero102615.
[19] Udi Dekel, "Operation Protective Edge: Strategic and Tactical Asymmetry," in *The Lessons of Operation Protective Edge*, ed. Anat Kurz and Shlomo Brom (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2014), 13.

victory is a fluid concept, the perception of which can change depending on the development of the post-war situation.

Israel's objectives in Operation Protective Edge

From the outset of Protective Edge, Israel had already decided on 'limited' objectives. In other words, Israel did not pursue total war bent on the complete destruction of its opponent. Instead, Israel's objectives during the 2014 Gaza conflict were to be achieved in three operational phases. The first phase consisted of precision aerial strikes, which lasted from 7 July to 17 July. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) sought to neutralize Hamas' and other terrorist organizations' rocket and mortar launching capabilities. However, they remained unsuccessful, as Israeli citizens still remained vulnerable to the threat of an attack by air, sea and land. Since the fighting continued and several ceasefire propositions were offered and/or broken, in addition to Hamas militants infiltrating Israeli territory via a cross-border assault tunnels (also sometimes labelled as 'terror tunnels'), the operation expanded to phase two (17 July to 5 August), when the IDF continued its aerial strikes combined with a limited ground incursion into the Gaza Strip. In spite of the IDF's efforts to dismantle this network of cross-border assault tunnels, the fighting continued and Israel moved to phase three (5 August to 26 August) of its military operation, which incorporated redeployment and prolonged aerial strikes until a ceasefire was reached.[20]

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that the main goal of Protective Edge was to ensure quiet and security for Israeli citizens, in particular those residing in the south.[21] However, as the fighting

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[20] State of Israel, *The 2014 Gaza Conflict*, 32.
[21] Yoram Schweitzer, "Defining the Victor in the Fight against an Army of "Terrorilla,"" in *The Lessons of Operation Protective Edge*, ed. Anat Kurz and Schlomo Brom (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2014), 23.

continued, the extent of the danger posed by attempted attacks of well-armed Hamas cells in the outskirts of kibbutzim became apparent. Thus, the objective of destroying Hamas' offensive network of tunnels was added.[22] As Netanyahu declared on 11 July 2014, four days after the initial launch of the military campaign against Hamas: "The military strikes will continue until we can be certain that the quiet has returned to Israeli citizens".[23] Netanyahu reaffirmed this goal on the establishment of the ceasefire and, on 27 August 2014, he stated that Israel's aim was to "strike hard at Hamas and the terrorist organizations" with the desire to "bring prolonged quiet to all Israeli citizens".[24]

Correspondingly, IDF spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Peter Lerner announced that "we are determined to lay a significant blow on Hamas' terror capabilities and infrastructure, eliminate any threat on Israeli sovereignty emanating from the Gaza Strip and restore stability to the southern region".[25] Some comments went as far as those of retired Colonel Pnina Sharvit Baruch, who claimed that the overall objective of Protective Edge was to stop Hamas militants from firing rockets at Israel. It was meant to destroy their will to continue the hostilities and make them see that the price they would pay would exceed the value of carrying out operations against Israel.[26] However, strictly speaking, as stated on its website, the IDFs' two official goals of Protective Edge were, firstly, to

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[22] Ibid., 23.

[23] State of Israel, "PM Netanyahu's Statement at the Defense Ministry," *Consulate General of Israel to the Midwest*, State of Israel, July 11, 2014, accessed December 12, 2016, http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2014/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-on-the-fourth-day-of-Operation-Protective-Edge-11-Jul-2014.aspx.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Yifa Yaakov and Spencer Ho, "Israel hits Hamas, Islamic Jihad leaders after rockets land north of Tel Aviv," *Times of Israel*, July 8, 2014, accessed December 11, 2016, http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-pounds-dozens-of-gaza-targets-in-major-counteroffensive/#ixzz36tlMyTGm.

[26] Thomas, "Operation Protective Edge."

restore security to Israeli civilians living under Hamas rocket fire, and secondly, to dismantle the Hamas tunnel network used to infiltrate Israel.[27]

There are varying degrees of opinions and judgements revolving around Israel's political and military objectives. It is hard to know with certainty what underlying objectives politicians and military officials generally express behind closed doors. It is largely acknowledged that the main goal of Protective Edge was to ensure a long period of calm and defer the next round of military confrontation for as long as possible,[28] which raises the question whether deterrence was an official objective during Protective Edge. Observing how the war unfolded and how Israel had fought its previous wars with Hamas suggests that, by and large, its strategic pattern was to restore calm as quickly as possible, while also desiring to achieve its limited war aims of restraining Hamas until the next round of fighting. For an asymmetrical war and a protracted dispute such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, short-term rather than long-term goals are often established, since short-term objectives are more easily attainable than long-term aims. Given the officially 'known' aims and the potentially 'unknown' objectives of Protective Edge, one must be careful in distinguishing between military goals, political goals and confidentially discussed aims, in order to be able to conduct a comprehensive analysis of Israel's objectives and determine whether these goals were successfully achieved.

Israel's claims to victory

In the aftermath of Protective Edge, there was much debate as to whether Israel came out victorious in the war against Hamas. This perspective is of

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[27] Israel Defense Forces, "Operation Protective Edge," *IDF Blog*, Israel Defense Forces, 2014, accessed November 7, 2016, https://www.idfblog.com/operationgaza2014/#Genralinformation.
[28] Dekel, "Operation Protective Edge," 13.

particular significance and interest, since both sides of the Gaza conflict of 2014 claimed to be victorious after the hostilities had ended. In general, Netanyahu and the Defense Minister, Moshe Ya'alon played down any definitive victory declarations. Instead, they made clear statements that the military objectives of Protective Edge had been achieved, which by itself constituted a victory.[29]

Even though the Israeli officials played down any absolute victory statements, Ya'alon nonetheless claimed that not only had Israel achieved an "impressive" victory against Hamas, but it had also triumphed on the diplomatic front.[30] From a military perspective, Benny Gantz, IDF Chief of Staff, emphasized that "Protective Edge is a story of success… it was important that our enemies could not beat us".[31] Likewise, Netanyahu issued the following statement on 27 August, 2014: "Upon the establishment of the ceasefire, I can say that there is a major military achievement here, as well as a major diplomatic achievement for the State of Israel". He continued his speech by detailing what Israel had achieved: "Approximately 1,000 terrorists were killed, including senior terrorists... We destroyed thousands of rockets, rocket launchers, rocket production facilities and other weapons, arsenals, command and control positions… We also foiled, of course, attempts by Hamas to attack us by land, sea and air".

Netanyahu claimed that "the blow that Hamas has now taken is unprecedented since it was founded… I must say that it also took a diplomatic hit". He concluded his speech with the question: "Will we

[29] Schweitzer, "Defining the Victor," 24.

[30] Ilan B. Zion, "Operation Protective Edge an 'impressive victory,' says Ya'alon," *The Times of Israel*, August 29, 2014, accessed October 24, 2016, http://www.timesofisrael.com/defense-minister-operation-protective-edge-an-impressive-victory/.

[31] Uzi Baruch, "Operation Protective Edge a 'Success'," *Arutz Sheva*, February 14, 2015, accessed November 13, 2016, http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/191328.

achieve our goal for prolonged calm? I think it is still too early to say but I can say that the harsh blow that Hamas and the terrorist organizations have taken, as well as our ability, via border controls, to prevent their rearming increase the chances that this goal will be achieved".[32]

Despite Netanyahu's more uplifting outlook on what could potentially be achieved in the future, his speech to the United Nations (U.N.) General Assembly on 29 September 2014, roughly one month after the ceasefire, suggests a different perspective. He claimed that Israel won, firstly, by destroying Hamas' terrorist capabilities and, secondly, by tainting its reputation and status on the diplomatic front. In Netanyahu's speech to the U.N., he drew parallels between Hamas, ISIS and more broadly, militant Islam. By conflating the two organizations, Hamas and ISIS, Israel would gain public relations benefits, since modern wars are propaganda wars, often competing for popular public support. In the middle of his speech, Netanyahu proclaimed that "Israel's fight against Hamas is not just our fight. It's your fight",[33] implying that the battle against Hamas was not over and must be carried out in the future with the help of the outside world. Thus, Netanyahu himself implicitly raised the question whether Israel had actually achieved a decisive victory.

Israeli officials never declared outright victory after Protective Edge to the public, suggesting perhaps the delicacy and intricacy of what victory entails. All press statements beg the question whether Israel did in fact win on the military front as well as the diplomatic front, as claimed by Israeli representatives. There is much evidence to refute their claims of victory.

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[32] State of Israel, "PM Netanyahu sums up Operation Protective Edge," *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, State of Israel, August 27, 2014, accessed November 13, 2016, http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2014/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-sums-up-Operation-Protective-Edge-27-Aug-2014.aspx.
[33] *The Jerusalem Post*, "Full text of Prime Minister Netanyahu's UN speech," *The Jerusalem Post*, September 29, 2014, accessed November 30, 2016, http://www.jpost.com/printarticle.aspx?id=376626.

However, if one looks at Israel's limited objectives, it can also be argued that Israel indeed fulfilled its mission during Protective Edge. This aspect will be discussed more closely in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

To what extent did Israel achieve its stated objectives?

During the 51-day military campaign, 2,200 Palestinians were killed. According to Israeli sources, half of these fatalities were combatants, including a number of leading Hamas military personnel.[34] In addition, Hamas' rocket arsenal was significantly reduced to about four-fifths of its pre-war number.[35] The IDF also succeeded in neutralizing a total of 32 cross-border assault tunnels, 18 of which were under construction and approached the border with Israel.[36] Thus, one can argue that the IDF indeed managed to defuse the threat that these 'terror-tunnels' posed to Israeli civilians.

Israel declared itself victorious in terms of meeting the objectives defined by the political echelon, forcing a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement on its own terms. Regarding the ceasefire agreement and negotiated settlement, Israel 'won' by not allowing Hamas to attain any of the strategic goals which it had fought for, such as forcing Israel to agree to the opening of border crossings and the construction of a naval port and an airport.[37] In Netanyahu's own words, it was a "ceasefire with no gains for Hamas".[38]

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[34] Israel claimed that many of the civilian deaths were the result of Hamas' deliberate policy of using their own people as human shields. However, Hamas claimed that 75 percent of the fatalities constituted civilian deaths. Eitan Shamir and Eado Hecht, "Gaza 2014: Israel's Attrition vs Hamas' Exhaustion," *Parameters* 44, no. 4 (2014): 87.

[35] Ibid., 87.

[36] State of Israel, *The 2014 Gaza* Conflict, 32.

[37] Dekel, "Operation Protective Edge," 32.

[38] Amos Yadlin, "The Strategic Balance of Operation Protective Edge: Achieving the Strategic Goal Better, Faster, and at a Lower Cost" in *The Lessons of Operation Protective Edge*, ed. Anat Kurz and Schlomo Brom (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2014), 199.

Until today, there are still major disputes concerning the extent to which Israel achieved its intended objectives. It is generally a challenge to declare outright victory after a war, especially in today's modern warfare. Since the 2014 Gaza War was an asymmetrical conflict against a non-state entity, it becomes almost impossible to accomplish a conclusive outcome that denies the enemy the desire and ability to continue fighting.[39] This is because it is very difficult for any state involved in an asymmetrical war to achieve tactical and ethical victories, since its adversary (often insurgent groups) do not abide by any of the established rules of warfare.[40] The meaning of victory is often unclear and contradictory for both 'winners' and 'losers', as there remains an inherent subjectivity of victory. According to Robert Mandel, military victory cannot be equated to political victory. He argues that to be considered victorious — after military victory — one must be able to secure an enduring peace settlement. Military victory 'must' transform into strategic victory. [41] However, once again, one is confronted with ambiguity, as the meaning of strategic victory is just as opaque as that of military victory.

Mandel continues to argue that military victory, in its most basic terms, means winning in combat. It requires achieving predetermined battle campaign objectives, including defeating aggression on terms favorable to oneself and one's allies as quickly and efficiently as possible, substantially reducing the enemy's future war-making potential, setting the post-conflict conditions, and minimizing collateral damage to civilians and their infrastructures. If one takes Mandel's formulation of military victory

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[39] Dekel, "Operation Protective Edge," 15.
[40] Dov Waxman, "Judging Israel's War," *Jewish Quarterly* 61(3-4), (2014): 45.
[41] Robert Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), 14.

and places it into context of Protective Edge, one could argue that Israel certainly achieved some of its strategic objectives.[42]

In Michael Walzer's analysis of Protective Edge, Israel would without a doubt have won in a conventional war with Hamas. However, the narrative changes, since asymmetrical warfare is a completely different type of war. It is a case of restrained force (Israel) against unrestrained violence (Hamas and other terrorist organizations).[43] Victory in contemporary hybrid conflicts is achieved largely on the level of perceived perceptions.[44] According to Uri Savir, an Israeli diplomat and former Member of the Knesset (MK): "Neither side gained what it had hoped for. Hamas made only tactical gains, Israel succeeded in destroying most of the terror tunnels. Yet Hamas was not militarily destroyed and politically was only weakened at best". He continues to state: "The world did recognize the terrorist nature and threat of Hamas, but sees in the Palestinian population the David to Israel's Goliath in this conflict".[45]

Overall, there are different interpretations concerning the extent of Israel's victory, be it military or diplomatic. Some scholars, such as Aaron Miller, Daniel Bar-Tal, Eitan Shamir and Eado Hecht argue that after Protective Edge, Israel did not win on the diplomatic front, as it failed to restore international legitimacy, since the prolonged war eroded support for Israel. However, militarily Israel achieved its limited strategic objectives. In spite of these varying opinions, it remains difficult to judge who won in the political arena, as it can only be determined with time.

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[42] Ibid., 16.
[43] Michael Walzer, "Israel Must Defeat Hamas, But Also Must Do More to Limit Civilian Deaths," *New Republic*, July 30, 2014, accessed November 21, 2016, https://newrepublic.com/article/118908/2014-gaza-war-how-should-israel-fight-asymmetrical-war-hamas.
[44] Yadlin, "The Strategic Balance of Operation Protective Edge," 205.
[45] Uri Savir, "Savir's Corner: The Aftermath of Operation Protective Edge," *The Jerusalem Post*, July 8, 2014, accessed October 25, 2016, http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/SAVIRS-CORNER-The-aftermath-of-Operation-Protective-Edge-370431.

The aftermath of Operation Protective Edge in a wider Israeli perspective

According to Israeli news site *Ynet*, the polls, which included 500 respondents from a sample representing the adult Jewish community of Israel, determined in July 2014 that 71 percent of Israelis believed the country was winning the ongoing campaign. By the beginning of August, that figure dropped sharply to 51 percent; half a year later, it stood at 46 percent. On the other hand, the percentage of those who believed that Hamas was winning the battle rose from 4 percent in August to 20 percent six months after the end of the war.[46] This survey clearly illustrates that victory is a fluctuating and subjective concept, with shifting perceptions. The assessment of a claimed victory can change with time, depending how the post-war circumstances develop.

War does not necessarily solve strategic or political problems. Short-term successes do not automatically transform into durable and sustainable peace and security. Operations like that of Protective Edge may only exacerbate the possibilities of further cycles of violence, which is exemplified in the numerous speeches made by Members of the Knesset (MK) in the aftermath of Protective Edge. Many politicians and the wider Israeli public still anticipate another round of violent conflict, despite the claims of victory and Israel's hope for a successful deterrence. This is evident in the 2015 statement by MK Haim Jelin: "A year later, and still there is no hope; we are waiting for the next round of fighting. Nothing changed and nothing will change as long as the prime minister thinks there is no solution and the conflict has to be managed… Without a policy, we will not leave this cycle of blood and continued rocket fire. No one is

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[46] *i24news*, "Six months later: Fewer Israelis think Israel won latest Gaza War," *i24news*, February 18, 2015, accessed December 16, 2016, http://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/diplomacy-defense/61510-150218-is-hamas-ready-to-wage-an-all-out-war-against-israel.

promising peace and quiet." Similarly, MK Mordhay Yogev said that Hamas was resuming the construction of tunnels and was planning the next conflict "while we are trying to see to it that Gaza is rehabilitated." MK Aida Touma-Sliman emphasized that military answers could no longer promise the stable situation that Israel was looking for: "The Palestinian people", she pointed out, "will continue to fight as long as the occupation persists. The only road towards real, humane security for both peoples passes through the end of the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital".[47] Like Touma-Sliman, Savir offers an alternative to the repeated unsuccessful military operations against Hamas. He suggests that Israel should indeed weaken Hamas, but instead of using force and violence, it should build bridges with Hamas' foes in Ramallah, Cairo, Riyadh and Amman.[48]

Amos Yadlin, former Israeli Air Force general, IDF military attaché to Washington D.C. and head of the IDF Military Directorate, argues that, since the established rules of war do not apply in asymmetrical conflicts, Israel faces conflicting tensions in the need to preserve its classic security concept — which he believes involves deterrence, early warning and decision — while also addressing the ever-changing characteristics of contemporary warfare.[49] Consequently, blurred understandings of what victory means, especially in wars of an asymmetrical nature, lead to difficulties in what objectives to set. In the case of Israel, it raises questions as to how 'victory' can be achieved, since the country finds itself confronted with a hybrid organization that does not abide by the conventional rules of war.

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[47] Knesset, *Knesset marks first anniversary of Operation Protective Edge; Speaker Edelstein: "We are a nation that seeks peace,"* Knesset Press Releases, July 8, 2015, accessed November 13, 2016, https://www.knesset.gov.il/spokesman/eng/PR_eng.asp?PRID=11630.
[48] Savir, "Savir's Corner."
[49] Yadlin, "Operation Protective Edge," 201.

In conclusion, Israel succeeded in its limited objectives to reestablish peace and security and, to some extent, destroy Hamas' terrorist capabilities. Israel achieved within its own matrix the objectives it had set for itself. However, the war hardly represented a final victory. Hamas survived a campaign that was waged against them by a massively superior force and its organization was kept essentially alive.[50] Moreover, Protective Edge resulted in a tarnished reputation and negative public image for Israel. The country clearly lost the propaganda war and the competition for popular support throughout the world. Netanyahu acknowledged as much in his speech to the U.N. shortly after the ceasefire agreement, by stating that he had come to defend Israel's actions and to "expose the brazen lies spoken from this very podium against my country".[51] Internally, Israeli hardliners believed that Protective Edge did not go far enough in eliminating the threat posed by Hamas, whereas liberals argued that alternatives to military action should have been pursued.[52] Protective Edge raises important questions about whether the military effort was worthwhile and whether there was any significant payoff. It thus illustrates the complexity and elusiveness of defining victory in a war, especially in situations of asymmetrical confrontations.

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[50] Uriel Heilman, "Who won and who lost in the Gaza War?" *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 5, 2014, accessed 5 December, 2016, http://www.jta.org/2014/08/05/news-opinion/israel-middle-east/who-won-and-who-lost-in-the-gaza-war.
[51] *The Jerusalem Post*, "Netanyahu's UN speech."
[52] Heilman, "Gaza War."

Chapter 3: Hamas and the 2014 Gaza War

Hamas was established in the 1980s as a charity and social agency with the backing of Israel, which regarded it as a counterweight to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Fatah. Paradoxically, Hamas' charter calls for the destruction of Israel and refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist. Hamas is perceived and labelled as a terrorist organization by many in the West, such as the United States[53], since its military wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, engages in terrorist activities. While the military wing consists of a relatively small part of the overall Hamas membership, it nevertheless promotes a rigid ideology that espouses violent struggle to achieve one's ends.[54] Some scholars, such as Yadlin, describe Hamas as a hybrid organization, since it is neither a classic terrorist organization nor a normal state.[55] Thus, when such a hybrid organization gets involved in a hybrid war, the generally accepted rules of war become blurred, as do the notions of 'victory' and 'defeat'.

The asymmetrical military campaign known as Protective Edge was hardly over when both sides claimed victory, despite the obvious devastating destruction that the Israeli army had inflicted on the Gaza Strip. The Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), Pierre Krähenbühl, calculated that $295 million in international aid would be required for the recovery of Gaza.[56] According to the Israeli narrative, the country was simply defending itself after being attacked by Hamas and other terrorist organizations through a continuous

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[53] U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," *Diplomacy in Action*, U.S. Department of State, accessed January 6, 2017, https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm.

[54] Daniel Bar-Tal, "Thoughts on the 2014 Gaza War," *Palestine-Israel Journal* 19, no. 4 (2014): 156.

[55] Yadlin, "Operation Protective Edge," 201.

[56] Elizabeth Dearden, "Israel-Gaza conflict: 50-day war by numbers," *The Independent*, 2014, accessed January 8, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-gaza-conflict-50-day-war-by-numbers-9693310.html.

escalation of rocket fire and other means. However, in August 2014, Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri declared unequivocally that his organization "did not start this war. It was imposed on us." He continued his speech by stating that "[w]e will defend ourselves as long as the Israeli occupation chooses to fight us".[57] The discrepancy between the respective narratives of Israel and Hamas with regard to who initiated the war and who won it, suggests the indistinctness that exists in the perception of major aspects of contemporary warfare.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate Hamas' claims to victory and to assess whether those claims hold any validity in light of the organization's objectives proclaimed during the war. Thus, the first subsection discusses the objectives which Hamas espoused during the war. The next section addresses Hamas' victory statements. It is followed by a discussion on the extent to which Hamas actually achieved its proclaimed war aims. Lastly, the aftermath of the 2014 Gaza War is examined in a wider Palestinian, regional and international perspective. The chapter concludes that Hamas did not in fact achieve a decisive victory, but instead accomplished short-lived victories by simply surviving the long war, causing damage to the enemy right up to the ceasefire and demonstrating to all Palestinians that armed struggle against Israel would bring more results than the Palestinian Authority's (PA) stagnant political posturing. Hamas won the propaganda battle against Israel and recovered its popularity in Gaza. On the other hand, some scholars argue that the Palestinian people of Gaza were actually the biggest "losers" of the war.[58] These incongruities demonstrate the lack of clarity in establishing what constitutes victory in a war and what kinds of metrics should be in place

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[57] Counter Extremism Project, "Sami Abu Zuhri," Counter Extremism Project, accessed January 15, 2017, http://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/sami-abu-zuhri.
[58] Aaron D. Miller, "Who Won the Gaza War?" *Foreign Policy*, August 6, 2014, accessed December 14, 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/06/who-won-the-gaza-war/.

for determining victory. As in the previous chapter, the challenges in determining 'victory' is then discussed in the following section.

Hamas' objectives in the 2014 Gaza War

By 2014, Hamas found itself in a weak position, isolated from the international agenda and regional politics, due to issues such as the Syrian civil war and Egypt cutting its former support of Hamas since Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's ascension to power. Some argue that Hamas deliberately pursued a confrontation with Israel for strategic gains, since its own popularity was dwindling rapidly, both at home and among Arab nations.[59] Other scholars, such as Glenn Robinson, maintain that Hamas did not in fact plan the large-scale conflict, but it exploited the opportunity it presented to reverse its increasingly weak position within Palestinian society and the Arab world.[60]

Even though Hamas' charter clearly states the intention to obliterate the Jewish state, during the Gaza War, its leadership pursued objectives that were far less ambitious. While some of these aims were specific, others were rather vague and unrealistic. Some objectives seemed to shift during the conflict, were rather incidental, or were proclaimed as 'war aims' only after the hostilities had actually ceased. For example, Hamas' demands for a lasting truce, submitted after one week of hostilities and one day after it had rejected an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire, included the release of Palestinian prisoners, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, the opening of the border crossings to Gaza, the closing of the air space over Gaza to Israeli aircraft and the establishment of a naval port and an airport

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[59] Shamir and Hecht, "Gaza 2014," 83.
[60] Glenn E. Robinson, "Gaza 2014: Hamas' Strategic Calculus," *Parameters* 44, no. 4 (2014): 91.

under U.N. supervision.[61] Also listed were conditions concerning Palestinian fishing rights, the permission for Palestinians to visit Jerusalem and pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque, and Israel's abstention from interfering in Palestinian internal affairs.[62] According to Robinson, however, Hamas had only two concrete war aims: first, to be perceived as having won the war by not having lost it; and, second, to focus international pressure on Israel to lift the embargo on Gaza. The latter, in particular, would have resulted in greatly strengthening Hamas' domestic political position.[63]

Thus, on 16 August 2014, five weeks into the conflict, Khaled Meshaal, Hamas' political leader, gave some indication of Hamas' principal objectives. In an interview with Al-Jazeera, he mentioned in general terms that the Palestinian demands had to be met, but he emphasized that "our people in Gaza must feel that they are longer under siege." "We want the border crossings to open," he stressed, "we want to have our own port, our own airport." He then brought up what he called "our foremost Palestinian demand" — "an end to occupation and an end to colonization." Meshaal asserted that the Palestinian people would continue their struggle until they had ended "the occupation, the colonization and the siege". According to Meshaal, this was both a nationalist and a humanitarian demand. For the Palestinian people, resistance was a means to an end: "They win their freedom through resistance, patience and sacrifice."[64] In the same vein, a senior Hamas spokesperson, Sami Abu Zuhri, announced

[61] Yasser Okbi and Maariv Hashavua, "Report: Hamas proposes 10-year cease-fire in return for conditions being met," *The Jerusalem Post*, July 16, 2014, accessed January 13, 2017, http://www.jpost.com/Operation-Protective-Edge/What-are-Hamass-conditions-for-a-cease-fire-363011.

[62] *Ma'an News Agency*, "Report: Hamas, Islamic Jihad offer 10-year truce," *Ma'an News Agency*, July 17, 2014, accessed January 13, 2017, http://www.maannews.com/Content.aspx?id=713579.

[63] Robinson, "Gaza 2014," 91, 99.

[64] Khaled Meshaal, interviewed by Martine Dennis, "'Not a war of choice,'" *Al-Jazeera*, August 17, 2014, accessed January 14, 2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/2014/08/khaled-meshaal-not-war-choice-201481516939516479.html.

that the organization was "ready for all options, including peaceful ones through mediators …" "We are also ready for the resistance choice", he affirmed, "which is based on exhausting the occupation and putting it under pressure until [Israel] accepts our demands."[65]

Due to the nature of this irregular conflict other rules to war apply. Hamas' tactics to a certain degree involved no limits to its use of violence, which resulted in the disregarding of international law. Since Hamas was the underdog, it was more 'justifiable' for its fighters to employ all types of strategies against the most powerful army in the Middle East. Not only was Hamas able to fight a total war against Israel, but its leaders were also able to spin the propaganda war in its favor by making several boastful declarations of victory. However, the results of this war were not clear-cut, thus the term 'victory' in the sense of a well-defined win-lose situation is extremely hard to apply.

Hamas' claims to victory

After 29 days of fighting, both Israel and Hamas declared victory. Unlike Israel's declarations of victory, which were played down, Hamas celebrated and boasted of the victory of its resistance 'muqawwamah'.[66] As Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri announced at a news conference: "We are here today to declare the victory of the resistance, the victory of Gaza, with the help of God, and the steadfastness of our people and the noble resistance."[67]

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[65] Counter Extremism Project, "Sami Abu Zuhri."
[66] Schlomi Eldar, "Both Israel and Hamas claim victory," *Al Monitor*, August 10, 2014, accessed January 4, 2017, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/israel-hamas-gaza-defeat-victory-destruction-gaza-rocket.html.
[67] Mohammed Daraghmeh and Karin Laub, "Israel-Gaza conflict: Hamas claims 'victory for the resistance' as long-term truce is agreed with Israel," *The Independent*, 2014, accessed January 9, 2017, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israel-gaza-conflict-hamas-says-long-term-truce-agreed-with-israel-9691910.html.

In his victory speech, delivered in Doha, Qatar, on 27 August, Meshaal declared that Hamas had "triumphed in Gaza" and that "every Palestinian in Gaza and every Palestinian in the world are partners in this victory". Interestingly enough, his address did not mention whether any of Hamas' specific demands had been achieved, and the "victory" Meshaal referred to was primarily a psychological or 'moral' triumph. He must have recognized, of course, that Hamas had been badly defeated in a conventional militarily sense, but it was crucial for him to emphasize that its fighters had not been humiliated. In a tacit admission that Hamas had not reached its specific war aims, he portrayed its outcome as "just a milestone to reaching our objective", which had brought the Palestinians closer to "Jerusalem, the al-Aqsa Mosque and our holy sites".[68]

The results that, in the eyes of Hamas, allowed them to claim victory were, for the most part, rather intangible. Considering that, out of all the Arab states, only Qatar had stood by Hamas before the war, Meshaal's claim that the entire "Islamic nation" had supported the people of Gaza as "partners" was certainly an accomplishment. "Did we not raise your esteem?" Meshaal rhetorically asked the people of Gaza. "You have become the crown jewel of the Palestinian people," he proclaimed, "the pride of the Arab and Islamic nation, and a major source of inspiration for all free peoples."[69]

But what about specific achievements? First of all, the notion of an invincible Israeli army had "sustained an unprecedented blow". Hamas fighters had "rubbed this army's nose in the dirt, humiliated it,

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[68] International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, "Hamas Leader issues Victory Speech from the safety of Qatar," *ICEJ*, August 29, 2014, accessed January 14, 2017, https://int.icej.org/news/headlines/hamas-leader-issues-victory-speech-safety-qatar.
[69] MEMRI, "Hamas Leader Khaled Mashal: Israel Perpetrated a Holocaust Worse than Hitler's in Gaza," MEMRI, August 27, 2014, accessed January 4, 2017, https://www.memri.org/tv/hamas-leader-khaled-mashal-israel-perpetrated-holocaust-worse-hitlers-gaza/transcript.

embarrassed it, and massacred its elite soldiers". "This is of importance," Meshaal claimed, "both in the material and moral sense, for us, as well as for the enemy." Secondly, referring to "five million Israelis hiding in shelters", Meshaal argued that Hamas had achieved a "balance of terror, and an equation of mutual suffering and of a mutual lack of security". Meshaal pointed out that he was not talking about a balance of power or deterrence. "But as for a balance of terror, mutual suffering, and mutual lack of security — indeed, these were achieved in this war."[70]

However, Meshaal stressed that, despite Hamas' victory in the recent war, the fight was far from over. While it had brought the Palestinians closer to their goal, the next battle against Israel had to involve all Palestinians and all Arabs. The Palestinian were still victims of Israeli aggression. In fact, in upholding the narrative of Palestinian victimhood, Meshaal concluded that Israel, which used the Holocaust as an excuse for its aggression, had "perpetrated a holocaust worse than the one perpetrated by Hitler". "Israel," Meshaal concluded, "has lost its monopoly over victimhood."[71]

Despite the enormous destruction caused in Gaza during Protective Edge by Israel's 'mowing the lawn' tactic, Hamas publicly played down the effects of Israeli military actions by refusing to admit to losses or mistakes. Instead, it proclaimed victory on psychological and moral grounds.[72] This proved to be relatively effective. A poll released in January 2015 showed that 58 percent of Gazans believed that Hamas had won the 2014 conflict.[73] Overall, their 'victory' had little or no connection to the actual military results of the war or to the massive destruction

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[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Jeffrey White, "The Combat Performance of Hamas in the Gaza War of 2014," *CTC Sentinel* 7, no. 9 (2014): 13.
[73] Robinson, "Gaza 2014," 93.

caused to Gaza and its residents. Nevertheless, Hamas, without a doubt, had won the propaganda war against Israel.

To what extent did Hamas achieve its stated objectives?

The intense asymmetry of 'regular' and 'irregular' warfare compel the 'irregular' fighters to employ certain styles of combat that benefit their own strengths and are disadvantageous to a 'regular' army. As Colin Gray points out: "Irregulars fight irregularly because they cannot succeed, or even survive, in any other way."[74] Thus, the 'irregular' Hamas fighters conducted a total war against Israel, disregarding the conventions of 'regular' warfare. On the other hand, the 'regular' Israeli troops, being the superior force, were limited in their military strategies by the precepts of conventional warfare. These unconventional dynamics in a war make it highly problematic to come up with a formative assessment of victory. Furthermore, Yadlin, like Bartholomees, argues that victory is achieved largely on the level of perceived perceptions. According to polls, Hamas' popularity increased during and after the war formally ended, in spite of the heavy losses and damage the war had caused. Not only did Hamas' popularity improve, but they were also considered to be the 'winner' of the war by the Palestinians.

According to the Jerusalem Post, Hamas' supporters championed its narrative through media channels. For example, Al-Jazeera frequently emphasized Palestinian victimhood and alleged Israeli atrocities in its news coverage. It also regularly featured the tag "Gaza triumphs" in its reports about the war. Similarly, the Lebanese newspaper Al-Akhbar ran the headline "Gaza Triumphant."[75] This raises the challenging question as

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[74] Colin Gray, *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 246.
[75] Ariel Ben Solomon, "Arabs see Gaza War stoppage as Hamas victory despite destruction," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 7, 2014, accessed January 6, 2017,

to who has the power and legitimate authority to determine the 'winner' and 'loser' in this kind of asymmetrical conflict.

Shadi Hamid, a scholar at the Brookings Institution's Center for Middle East Policy, highlights a fundamental question in the theory of victory: "Hamas' survival will be spun by its leaders as evidence of victory and this is always the challenge in asymmetrical warfare: how do you deny victory to groups that don't conceive of victory in conventional terms?" The key factor, Hamid argues, would be the extent to which Hamas was able to claim victory by pointing to an easing of the Israeli blockade on Gaza and to an improvement in living conditions. "Hamas," he points out, "has to be able to make the case to its constituents that it was worth it."[76]

In order to illustrate the subjectivity of perceptions during or after the Gaza War, a public opinion poll was conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), which randomly interviewed adults from the West Bank and Gaza between 26 August and 30 August 2014. It found that, during and immediately after the war, there was a spike in the popularity of Hamas and its leaders and a major decline in the popularity of Fatah and the PA's President Mahmoud Abbas. An overwhelming majority of 80 percent saw Hamas as the winner of the war. Only 3 percent credited Israel with the victory, while 17 percent saw both Hamas and Israel as losers.[77]

As mentioned before, if one looks at Hamas' achievements during the war that would justify the victory claim, one realizes that they had nothing to do with the stated war aims or demands, but were rather incidental and

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http://www.jpost.com/Operation-Protective-Edge/ANALYSIS-Arabs-see-Gaza-war-stoppage-as-Hamas-victory-despite-destruction-370303.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Rosa Lia, "Palestinian Public Opinion in the Wake of the Gaza War," *Palestine-Israel Journal* 19, no. 4 (2014): 151-154.

short-lived. One example of Hamas' important achievements was that the military actions of its fighters and the rocket attacks caused the evacuation of Israeli settlements along the border with Gaza,[78] signifying to the Palestinian people that only through violence could Israel be forced to retreat. As Jeffrey White, a defense fellow at the Washington Institute, points out, Hamas was also successful in disrupting day-to-day life and economic activity, especially in southern Israel.[79]

While Hamas' concrete military accomplishment was clearly limited, one has to agree with Meshaal that, to some extent, they were effective in generating psychological fear and unease in Israeli society. The continuous rocket fire that Israel found itself under kept its people under constant threat. Even in the last five days of the conflict, more than 700 rockets and mortar shells were still fired into Israel. Although the rockets may not have caused many Israeli casualties, they could reach 60 percent of Israel's population. This war of attrition from both sides and with the repeated disruption of everyday life, the morale of the Israeli citizens was clearly tested and may eventually have put pressure on the government to end the hostilities.[80]

It may be argued that Hamas' fierce resistance in the face of an infinitely superior Israeli military army constituted in itself a victory. Haneen Zoabi, an Arab Israeli Member of the Knesset, articulated this opinion by declaring: "The will of the Palestinian resistance was not broken, and the people of Gaza stood strong. Israel did not achieve any of its political or military aims. When bombarded by one of the strongest armies in the world, that is an undoubted victory".[81] As previously mentioned before,

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[78] White, "Combat Performance," 10.
[79] Ibid., 10.
[80] Shamir and Hecht, "Gaza 2014," 85.
[81] Shaiel Ben-Ephraim, "When Winning is not the Goal: Why Israel did not Defeat Hamas," *International Policy Digest*, September 21, 2014, accessed January 15, 2017, https://intpolicydigest.org/2014/09/21/winning-goal-israel-defeat-hamas/.

one of Hamas' objectives was to survive and not be seen as having lost the war. Hamas' military leadership remained intact and was able to launch rockets into Israel consistently over the 51-day war right up until the ceasefire agreement. In addition, Hamas was able to force Israel's Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv to be closed for two days, and its fighters managed to kill six times the number of IDF soldiers as in the two previous Gaza wars combined. Furthermore, Hamas successfully challenged Israel's security measures by initiating several tunnel-infiltration operations during Protective Edge. Due to Hamas' 'success', Hamas, unlike the PA, was viewed according to polls as an effective party for the Palestinian people to resist Israel and its occupation. Overall, Hamas won the 'hearts and minds' of the Palestinian people and, to some extent, on the international level.[82]

By and large, Hamas reached its short-term goals. Hamas' survival, its ability to remain in power in Gaza, to keep its leadership together, to inflict harm onto Israel and to rally international support for its cause all improved Hamas' power and prestige vis-à-vis the PA.[83] However, these were short-lived victories. Hamas did not achieve its stated objectives. It did not gain a seaport or an airport, did not end the occupation, did not succeed in opening the borders, and failed to bring about the lifting of the embargo. Even Abbas' senior advisor, Mahmoud al-Habbash, called on Hamas to admit that, given its own long-term objectives, it had lost the war.[84]

Four months after hostilities had ended, little had changed concerning the inherent problems that the Gaza reconstruction process faced. In

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[82] Miller, "Who Won?"
[83] Robinson, "Gaza 2014," 98.
[84] Omri Ceren, "Palestinian Authority Blasts Hamas for Provoking Israeli Retaliation, Calls on Group to Admit Defeat," *The Tower*, August 29, 2014, accessed January 17, 2017, http://www.thetower.org/0984oc-palestinian-authority-blasts-hamas-for-provoking-israeli-retaliation-calls-on-group-to-admit-defeat/.

November 2014, even fewer materials were entering Gaza than before the war. Hamas accepted that the PA would be in charge of the process of reconstruction and would supervise the crossings into Gaza. The Israeli control of Gaza's borders was ultimately left unchallenged.[85] Even though Hamas had proved capable of withstanding a superior Israeli army, its rocket offensive had caused few casualties, the offensive tunnel system had not lead to any real successful penetration of the border defense system, and lastly, its fighters had been unable to stop IDF ground operations.[86] Many academics, such as Aaron Miller and Shariel Ben-Ephraim, argue that ultimately the 1.8 million Palestinians of Gaza, 53 percent of whom are under the age of 18, are the biggest 'losers' of the war.[87] Both Alex Vanness'[88] and Savir's[89] arguments regarding victory in the Gaza War bring us back to the question of perceived perceptions and the influence politicians and the media have on public opinion, which essentially underlines the inherently biased judgment of victory and defeat.

The aftermath of the 2014 Gaza War in a wider Palestinian, regional and international perspective

After hostilities had formally ended, Hamas was able to revise its balance of power with the PA to its advantage. Hamas could now portray itself as the only serious fighting force confronting Israel, which proved more favourable amongst Palestinians as compared to the PA's position of adjustment and defeatism. The war brought into stark relief the contrast

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[85] Dimitris Bouris, "The Vicious Cycle of Building and Destroying: the 2014 War on Gaza," *Mediterranean Politics* 20, no. 1 (2015): 115.
[86] White, "Combat Performance," 9.
[87] Miller, "Who Won?"
[88] Alex Vanness, "How Hamas can claim victory after Operation Protective Edge," *BreitBart*, September 25, 2014, accessed January 11, 2017, http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/09/25/how-hamas-can-claim-victory-after-idf-campaign-devastates-gaza/.
[89] Savir, "Savir's Corner."

between Hamas' challenge of Israel ('muqawama') and the PLO's attempts to come to some kind of agreement ('musawama').[90] Despite its success in certain areas, including the winning of a seat at the negotiating table in Cairo as part of the unity government, Hamas still faced major challenges in securing its position in Gaza and maintaining its popularity among the Palestinian people. For example, Hamas would need to find a way to justify and compensate the Gazans for the destruction the war has caused. The Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR) calculated that nearly $8 billion was required to rebuild Gaza.[91] While this may have been a highly inflated figure given the UNRWA estimates referred to above, the fact remains that Hamas could not meet these requirements on its own. Hamas could not govern Gaza alone; it needed the help of both the PA and Egypt, which meant that it entered the negotiations in an already weakened position.[92]

Furthermore, Hamas claimed to have achieved major gains with the ceasefire agreement. However, a ceasefire is simply a ceasefire, and it did not necessarily mean the agreements would be implemented. One of the major provisions stipulated that the PA was expected to take over from Hamas the responsibility for administering Gaza's borders. If this would actually ever materialize, it could have an immense impact on future politics. The PA has not had any major presence in Gaza since Hamas removed it during the 2007 Palestinian civil war. For the first time in years, Fatah could, therefore, be in a position to turn the security control into political gain in Gaza at the expense of Hamas. This opportunity would give Fatah the opportunity to present itself as improving the lives of the Palestinians without the use of violence.[93] Even with Hamas being

[90] Robinson, "Gaza 2014," 98.
[91] Ibid., 97.
[92] Miller, "Who Won?"
[93] Zack Beauchamp, "The Gaza war is over. Here's what it means for the future of Israel-Palestine," *Vox*, August 27, 2014, accessed January 14, 2017,

weakened militarily and politically, it still remains unclear if Israel and the PA will take advantage of this opportunity. Brent Sasley does not see Hamas' "hold on Gaza declining to any great degree in the near future". He further claims that the post-reconstruction really depends on what Israeli politics and on the role of the PA and the international community.[94]

Throughout Protective Edge, major divisions between governments, groups and politicians occurred. According to Shadi Hamid "a sharp divide" had opened up between the so-called 'moderate' Arab governments — which wanted to see Hamas destroyed more than Israel did — and Arab publics which see Israel as the primary aggressor and sympathize, to one degree or another, with Hamas. Hamas was relying on large-scale international pressure to be placed on Israel. However, as Hamid points out, the expected pressures did not effectively materialize, and even some of the Arab regimes, not only Egypt, seemed to more or less openly support Israel over Hamas.[95] The advantages or disadvantages of eliminating Hamas entirely from Gaza have often been discussed. It is believed that removing Hamas would only lead to a power vacuum or anarchy, where a much 'worse' force could be installed in Gaza. Alternatively, Israel would be required to govern Gaza. Both would be very undesirable perspectives for Israel.[96] Thus, maintaining a contained and weakened Hamas is Israel's least disagreeable policy option, which explains the regular 'mowing of the lawn' tactics in Gaza. As a result, many politicians and scholars predict another war in the near future, as the conflict continues and remains unresolved.

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http://www.vox.com/2014/8/27/6072077/ceasefire-hamas-gaza-palestinian-authority-israel.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Solomon, "Gaza War."
[96] Shamir and Hecht, "Gaza 2014," 88.

In conclusion, it is exceptionally difficult to determine success after an asymmetrical war, where there is no way to stipulate clear terms of peace, leaving the post-reconstruction period rather open-ended. Wars such as the 2014 Gaza War often lead to a blurring of understandings of the laws of armed conflict and the challenges that are posed by protocols and treaties already in place to regulate and terminate wars.[97] Thus, we are forced to then articulate what a 'reasonable success' looks like. However, our understanding of victory remains partial, as the challenge in determining a decisive victory is an abstract and intangible concept that is largely dependent on one's own biases.

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[97] Elshtain, "Terrorism," 119.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The ways in which we fight wars today has changed with the technological advances and changing political landscapes. This raises the question if our understanding of 'victory' in a war has evolved sufficiently to be applicable and valid in cases of asymmetrical or hybrid warfare. Victory is a contentious and provocative term, but it has the capacity to influence the destiny of nations, shape future behavior of states, offer resolutions and credibility and much more.[98] However, in modern war, it is especially difficult to identify a clear demarcation between 'victory' and 'defeat'. Failure to define victory is not necessarily the result of an increasing complexity of warfare, but instead reveals a lack of scholarly work on victory to develop, as well as a lack to implement achievable policies by politicians and policymakers during times of war. As previously stated, Bartholomees argues that 'victory' is a political phenomenon and that it is ultimately perceptions that matter when it comes to understanding 'victory' in war. This may include a wide a range of opinions—from the public, to politicians, to the media and to the international community. This can be clearly illustrated in the 2014 Gaza War, where both Israel and Hamas declared victory.

The aftermath of Protective Edge left nothing but a grim sentiment of hopelessness and grievances. Both sides claimed victory, and indeed, they might have achieved some of their objectives. Nevertheless, both Hamas and Israel did little to pave the path to reconciliation. Thus, it brings us to the question: Has victory really been achieved? It is clear that a long-lasting peace deal between Israel and Palestine is improbable in the near future, since the violence between the Israelis and Palestinians has not ceased, and the recurring hostilities have not resolved any substantial issues. Continued violence has erupted since the formal termination of

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[98] Mandel, *Military Victory*, 1.

Protective Edge, and it continues to occur on Israeli territory as well as on Palestinian territory. Such operations as Protective Edge, it is clear, will only exacerbate further cycles of violence, and Israel's periodic operations of 'mowing the lawn' in Gaza is obviously not a long-term solution. Thus, academics and military experts must find a more dynamic sense of victory, since it would be highly advantageous to know what we have to do to achieve victory, when we have reached victory and when we can move past the termination of war. Without an in-depth understanding of victory, we are always at risk of not knowing when a war is over.

If one were to reduce the outcome of 2014 Gaza War to a simple victor-loser dichotomy and apply Henry Kissinger's analysis of the Vietnam War, one could conclude that Hamas won by not losing and Israel lost by not winning.[99] However, the issues revolving around 'victory' and 'defeat' are far more complex than Kissinger's approach. O'Driscoll argues that the standard view of victory entails the diminishment of the enemy's war-making capabilities and its morale to coerce its defeat. However, he recognizes the complexities which victory pose, as there are no obvious criteria to determine if one has achieved such ends.[100] Some of the suggested formulas to establish victory or defeat are not particularly useful anymore. One could argue, therefore, that, in today's world of asymmetrical warfare, success should be based on the objectives set by policymakers, military experts and politicians, and victory should be determined by whether or not these objectives have been achieved.

In the 2014 Gaza War, Israel lacked the ability to pursue a transformative or decisive victory over Hamas, as well as the mechanisms to stifle Hamas' political motivation. In general, Israel is able to contain the buildup of Hamas' war-making capabilities, but it will be extremely

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[99] Robinson, "Gaza 2014," 98.
[100] O'Driscoll, "The victory of just war," 802.

challenging to deter Hamas's violent activities for an indefinite period of time.[101] Thus, Israel continually pursues limited objectives that temporarily restore security and safety through limited military campaigns in Gaza. Thus, Israel's established objectives for Protective Edge were indeed met; hence, in this sense, Israel can legitimately claim victory. On the other hand, if one were to take Patterson's metrics of victory by which victory can only be determined through the post-conflict reconciliation process,[102] then Israel without a doubt failed.

In contrast to Israel's success during its military campaign, Hamas' victory or defeat is an especially difficult one to determine. Assessing whether Hamas justifiably won the war is problematic, as its demands were far too unrealistic in the given circumstances. As a result, with unrealistic goals set by Hamas, one cannot truly or accurately assess whether they were achieved. However, as the underdog in an asymmetrical war, Hamas constantly attempted to spin even the smallest success into an outright victory. In essence, Hamas failed to achieve its set objectives, and none of its demands were actually met in the ceasefire agreement. But Hamas' rhetoric of victory made no reference at all to its ceasefire demands and instead emphasized different goals that it claimed to have achieved. While it became clear, once again, that Israel's resort to massive force was not the appropriate means for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Hamas' use of force, proved to the Palestinians that it could have an impact on Israeli morale and create tensions in Israeli society. The outcome left both sides in a familiar state of deadlock.[103]

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[101] Mark Heller, "Israeli Deterrence in the Aftermath of Protective Edge" in *The Lessons of Operation Protective Edge*, ed. Anat Kurz and Schlomo Brom (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2014), 84.
[102] Beckerman, "What does victory mean?"
[103] Keith Khan-Harris, "Reflections on the Gaza Conflict," *Jewish Quarterly* 61, no. 3-4 (2014): 67.

Is this perhaps how we should understand victory in asymmetrical wars today, as partial successes, incremental achievements and limited accomplishments? As it is has become increasingly rare to achieve a transformative victory in modern war, does this set a lower bar for what war and its outcomes mean? Do politicians and military leaders have to lower their expectations in terms of the results of modern wars? Since each war is unique in its own way, does it mean that victory as a concept is susceptible to instability and shifting perceptions? These questions are unlikely to be resolved any time soon, as the concept of victory is still being disputed among scholars and policymakers and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

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