

The background of the cover is a light yellow-green gradient. It is decorated with several stylized, dark green leaf motifs. Each motif consists of a short stem with two leaves pointing in opposite directions. These motifs are scattered across the cover, with some appearing near the top and others near the bottom.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONFLICT AND COMBAT

Ben Shalit

 *Greenwood*
PUBLISHING GROUP

The Psychology of Conflict and Combat

This page intentionally left blank

The Psychology of Conflict and Combat _____

Ben Shalit

PRAEGER

New York
Westport, Connecticut
London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shalit, Ben.

The psychology of conflict and combat / Ben Shalit.

p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-275-92753-9 (alk. paper)

1. Combat—Psychological aspects. 2. Conflict (Psychology)

I. Title.

U22.3.S43 1988

355'.001'9—dc19

87-23729

Copyright © 1988 by Praeger Publishers

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without the express written consent of the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 87-23729

ISBN: 0-275-92753-9

First published in 1988

Praeger Publishers, One Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10010

A division of Greenwood Press, Inc.

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is dedicated to the memory of General Haim Laskov who inspired and supported me both in my work in Israel and in the years that followed.

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Tables and Figures	ix
1. Introduction	1
2. The Perception of Conflict and Combat	9
3. A Model for Conflict and Combat Behavior	19
4. What Is Aggression?	39
5. Origins of Aggression and Its Evaluation	57
6. What Is the Enemy?	83
7. Courage	96
8. Discipline	120
9. Assessment of the Coping and Combat Potential	154
10. Lebanon—The Face of Battle	169
11. Conclusion	185
Bibliography	187
Index	197
About the Author	205

This page intentionally left blank

Tables and Figures

TABLES

2.1	Factors Listed as "The Most Frightening Aspect of Battle" by Veteran Israeli Platoon and Company Soldiers and Officers	11
2.2	Factors Listed as "The Most Frightening Factor in Battle" by Swedish UN Soldiers	12
3.1	Cross Tabulation of the Jump Effectiveness and Perception Criteria	32
4.1	The Different Types or Categories of Aggression Proposed by Buss	43
4.2	Attitudes toward the Enemy Shown by Israeli Combat and Support Troops on Three Fronts	47
4.3	Comparison of "Hate" Scores of Israeli Soldiers from Islamic and Western Countries (1973)	49
5.1	The Parameters of Aggression as Represented in Some Theories of Aggression	70
6.1	The Differences in Attitude toward Their Captors among Prisoners Returning from Syria and from Egypt	92
6.2	Distribution of Mean Anxiety and Hostility Scores in Israeli POWs Returning from Egypt and Syria	93
9.1	Correlations between Enlisted Personnel Self-Report Indexes and Behavioral Ratings of Platoon Morale	159

FIGURES

3.1	Schematic Presentation of the Process of Appraisal	23
3.2	The Nine Stages of the Sequential Appraisal Model (SAM)	28
3.3	The Role of the SAM Stages in the Perceptual Process Leading to Action	30
3.4	The Role of the SAM Stages in the Group Members' Perceptual Process Leading to Action	31

3.5	Questions for Assessing SAM Stages 4–8 for the Appraisal of an Imminent Parachute Jump	31
3.6	Examples of Symptoms That Might Arise from Process Failures in Each of the SAM Stages	33
5.1	Flow Chart for Aggressive Strategies	75
5.2	Diagrammatic Representation of Motivational Determinants of Aggression in Instinct, Behavior (Reactive Drive), and Social Learning Theories	80
8.1	A Schematic Presentation of Groups with Different Degrees of Cohesion: A—a Chain—each individual has but one link to another dependent; B—a Diamond—multiple links between members	143
9.1	SSA Analysis of the IDF Troop Morale Questionnaire Response	156
9.2	The Wheel Questionnaire (WQ)	163

The Psychology of Conflict and Combat

This page intentionally left blank

1

Introduction

BACKGROUND

The glow of the lights of Haifa and Mount Carmel were just fading over the horizon. The night was as dark as a moonless cloudy night at sea can be, and the muffled sounds of the MTB (Motor Torpedo Boat) engines were hardly sufficient to break the monotony of the swooshing sounds of waves. The figures on the dark deck were lost—their outlines diffusing in the grayness—and only the larger dark shadow of the rubber boat gave some outline that the eye could fasten to and trace with some comforting assurance.

I was a psychologist—just released on the world from the university and standing now in the lee of the bridge, feeling rather confused and exhilarated. I was doing my national service as a psychologist in the Israeli Navy, and had convinced the various levels of command (thus, incidentally, myself also) that one cannot possibly serve as a psychologist in the military without sharing the world of experience of those one is supposed to work with. So here I was, on board one of three MTBs going north on an active mission. We were supposed to land commando troops and their boats, wait while they carried out their tasks, and then collect them and return to base.

If all went well, this would be a simple (if tense) operation, involving—on my part—hours of waiting in a boat that was tossed about just a few meters west of the enemy shore. If all did not go well . . .

It was curious—and quite a bit unsettling—to realize how much I really wanted things to happen—in fact, to go wrong. Not because I wanted to see any of my friends in danger, not because I had any feelings or desire to hurt the enemy, but simply so as to experience the tension of action—the thrill of the challenge and danger. This bears no relation to not being afraid, for I

was scared stiff and could well visualize the possible disastrous outcomes; but, regardless of all that—I wanted action.

The tension was mounting. We were waiting for a signal from the commando group ashore to draw nearer and evacuate them. I was now next to the captain on bridge. The continuous hiss of the open channel wireless was at the center of our attention, for just three short interruptions of that hiss—with no word said—would be our signal to creep inshore to the rendezvous point. Time was getting short, the captain was restless, and the operation's commander could not even pretend to be the calm figure that he had always admired in war films (especially with a psychologist standing there watching).

Suddenly, it all blew up. Shooting on shore . . . violent outbursts . . . lights streaking in all directions . . . and signal lights. . . . Our boat lurched forward; we raced into the enemy harbor and immediately became the focal point for a barrage that, whatever its objective danger, looked as if it would finish us off in no time. I was paralyzed: My eyes were fixed on the tracers seemingly heading specially and only at me; I was unable to think, and unable to do—but what was there for me to do?

The pressure on me was mounting to what I felt must be the breaking point; the boat swung in, firing from all its weapons; the noise and light were hammering at me so that it seemed I must collapse, for there was nothing I could do—when a sudden transition occurred.

Looking back—in retrospect—I can describe and understand what happened. At the time, it felt as if a weight had suddenly lifted, and as if I were suddenly released from bonds. I could breathe again; I could control my fate again. In fact, I had not moved, although my muscles must have relaxed. Nothing had changed: The firing and screaming of bullets and commands went on, but now I was observing.

At last, I had something to do—in fact, I was doing what I had set out to do in the first place—to study how others react. Now the pressure was off me; now the situation—as far as I was concerned—was clear, and so was my response to it.

On my right was mounted a heavy machine gun. The gunner (normally the cook) was firing away with what I can only describe as a beatific smile on his face. He was exhilarated by the squeezing of the trigger, the hammering of the gun, and the flight of his tracers rushing out into the dark shore. It struck me then (and was confirmed by him and many others later) that squeezing the trigger—releasing a hail of bullets—gives enormous pleasure and satisfaction. These are the pleasures of combat, not in terms of the intellectual planning—of the tactical and strategic chess game—but of the primal aggression, the release, and the orgasmic discharge.

Being shot at is no pleasure, but being able to shoot seems to give most people a feeling of great satisfaction and release. This is partly a response to

the release of tension; but, to a great extent, it also seems to be satisfying in its own right, having nothing to do with the consequences of the act. It is not the pleasure of killing the enemy; indeed, in Israel, hate toward the enemy rarely plays a role in motivation for combat. Wars are often irrational; the arguments for having a war are often irrelevant or meaningless for the ordinary soldier ("not for us to reason why, but for us to shoot and die"). Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of people have gone to war and died—being motivated by what?

On the very personal level, I had to ask myself why I had chosen to expose myself to unnecessary dangers: What made me, like so many others, find thrill in combat—whether as a direct participator or a vicarious observer? What makes us seek combat, when rationally it is often unnecessary; and how do we manage to function in conditions under which, logically, we should not function? Not only do we manage to function well under such conditions, but often even enjoy it.

It was a traumatic introduction into the psychology of combat—one that raised many questions on motivation, the ability to cope, the meaning of courage, and the function of leadership. It took many years of direct and indirect participation in such experiences to be able to clarify the questions involved—and then some more, to outline a few possible answers. But never again did I experience such a shock of realization that combat—for combat's sake—can be a strong motivation and source of pleasure and that a man must know his function or role in any situation in order to be able to cope with it.

This is a book about combat. Whether we like it or not—and without needing a better laboratory proof than human history—combat is an integral part of human behavior. There is a need to study it, understand it, and comprehend its dynamics and manifestation; but one must first accept it as an integral part of human behavior. Such behavior might well be modified, contained, assimilated, and directed; nevertheless, it will remain a basic human characteristic. To study it in a completely detached academic (or even clinical) way—without allowing for the nonquantifiable and unformulaic aspects—is to dehumanize it. This would not only make such studies inaccurate; it might well make their outcome misleading and dangerous.

Several investigations have shown that the further a person is from the consequences of his decisions or acts, the more extreme and often callous those acts become. It seems to me that much the same rule applies to one's analysis and evaluation of the behavior of others. The more detached, clinical, and withdrawn one is about such evaluations, the more one might be willing to reach conclusions and advocate methods that—although they appear neat and efficient—involve coercion and loss of respect for the human spirit.

I do not pretend to know (or even guess) what the "human spirit" is; and in the context of this book, it is not a relevant question. It may well be viewed

here as a black box in which some process of interaction and integration between personal and environmental inputs occurs, according to rules that we cannot (or cannot yet) describe. But one must not discount this element—for, by discounting it, one falsifies the nature of human behavior. Since we cannot define it and we must not discount it, the best we can do is to fill in with our own feelings and perceptions as human beings. No doubt, this introduces a strong noise factor into any analysis, and renders any description and model less than perfect and objective—and yet it gives such a system or analysis a greater veracity than one from which this subjective element has been exorcised.

Thus, when writing this book, I did not attempt to remove the personal element from it. In fact, I believe that if I have succeeded in attaining any clarity and offering any coherent explanation for some aspects of combat, it is precisely because of my involvement in combat situations.

However, one must constantly retain awareness of this involvement. It is essential to be aware of the explicit subjective contribution to the interpretations and discussions; and so, whenever possible, I have attempted to point these out.

Some of what is reported must be seen in the context of the current Israeli-Arab conflict. This book is in no way an attempt to take sides on the issue, or to analyze the impact of geopolitical factors on the psychological behavior. But, being an officer in one of the armies in that conflict—with all the implications of being on a particular side in certain campaigns—must have shaped my perception of events. No doubt, things would have been seen and felt differently had I been an officer in the other army. I can only hope that the essential elements of human behavior and attitude toward combat would have been described similarly by me, even were I starting from the other point of view. It is my hope that the model derived in one emotional setting (and later tested a little in another setting) relates to essential features of behavior—so that it will prove valid even when applied in other—greatly dissimilar—contexts.

But not only is this book based on my experiences as an Israeli, it is also heavily affected by my life in Sweden. Coming from the highly active, aggressive and turbulent environment of Israel to live in Sweden proved to be going from one extreme to the other. Sweden has not had war for about 190 years; it is a basically homogeneous country with a strong sense of social responsibility, order, and stability. The contrast between the two countries—both good and bad (subjectively perceived, of course)—helped to highlight many points in the different aspects of human conflict behavior. Because of this, I shall often contrast findings and impressions of the two countries, when they serve to illustrate points.

THE SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book is about the psychological factors that enable and lead men to engage in combat. In the United States, *Standard Dictionary* defines “combat”

as "to fight, to resist, to do battle"; while the British *Chambers Dictionary* defines it as "to contest, to oppose, to debate." Both definitions indicate the essence of combat to be conflict and striving against—whether in a purely physical context or in a more intellectual setting.

There is another way one may differentiate combat: differentiation in accordance with the nature of the interaction between the combatants or combatting forces. In fact, combat does not have to take place between men alone, it is often described as occurring between man and his environment—fighting the forces of nature or even blind fate. In combat against the stormy seas, one is required to pit skill, courage, knowledge, and judgment against elements that are essentially unpredictable and do not obey rules of behavior set by men. Most important of all—in all combat against nature, we can respond, avoid, or adapt, but can never affect and shape our protagonist's behavior. Combat between men is a match between two sides that are (theoretically, at least) equally capable of understanding, predicting, and affecting each other's behavior.

Combat against nature—much like gambling—involves a risk situation in which we cannot change the odds; we can only decide how big a risk we are willing to take. In combat against men, we aspire to reach complete control of the other's behavior, to act with absolute certainty or—at least—to actively reduce the odds against us. It is when the gambler feels that he can be absolutely certain—or the soldier feels that he can gamble—that the most disastrous results often occur.

This book will focus on combat between men—the deliberate aggressive behavior of man to man. Some such behavior may involve naked violence, hostility, and fear—even if theoretically governed by so-called civilized rules of war. Other behavior involves ritualized disputes and patterns of negotiations, without evoking any physical threat. Yet they all have in common the deliberate behavior aimed at "getting the better of" (a much more dramatic version of S. Potter's "one-upmanship") the opponent—whether by actual annihilation or by dictating and coercing the other's behavior. The opponent has a precisely similar aim; and the ideal outcome for either side—total success—would, necessarily, be at the expense of the other.

The most dramatic examples of combat behavior are found in the military setting; but, even if we think of combat in physical terms only, it is not restricted to the military. Men seek legitimate combat with men in the police and prison service, and under many other less organized and certainly less respectable establishments. Daily industrial strife and even family life are often a setting for combat. These versions may at times be less dramatic, but they inevitably obey the same psychological rules as those that govern the more explicit, physically oriented combat of war.

An attempt will be made to explore and explain the factors that build up in a person or a group to make them willing and able to engage in combat. Further, an attempt will be made to explain how such factors can be influenced

so as to make people more capable of combat. It seems to be an inescapable fact that combat of some kind is an essential part of the psychological and social structure of mankind. Even Isaiah—in his famous vision of the peaceful days to come (Isa. 11:6) in which the lion will cease combat with the lamb—prophesies that men will go on warring as usual (Isa. 11:14): “and the Philistines you will cast into the sea.” However, one does not necessarily have to follow the bloodthirsty biblical prescriptions. Combat may be essential, but this does not mean that it requires the horrors of war—of megatons and megadeath. Understanding the mechanisms of combat might well allow us to fulfill the psychological needs and to allow the benefits derived from human challenge, conflict, fear, courage, and victory, without the excess that is often associated with it today.

Before one is ready to engage in conflict, one must have answered (at least unconsciously) three basic questions:

1. “What is it all about?” That is, is the perceived situation sufficiently clear that it can be understood and thus acted on?
2. “Does this concern me?” That is, even if I understand, do I consider this relevant for me at this point in time?
3. “Can I do something about it?” That is, even if I understand and consider it relevant, do I have the potential to cope with it—and thus fight for it?

These are questions that have no objective answer. The individual must appraise the situation; make his judgment on the basis of all his past experiences, knowledge and expectations; and come to some conclusion. This is the process by which objective reality is translated into the subjective reality of the individual, and forms the basis for all his behavior.

This book is focused on the process of appraisal—the way we perceive ourselves and our relationship to the environment. Naturally, emphasis will be placed on the relationship between the process of perception and appraisal, and combat behavior.

Chapter 2 discusses and illustrates the idea that truth (like beauty) is in the eye of the beholder. One cannot talk of reality—even in regard to a battle—other than through the eyes of those appraising it. It is only after mapping this appraisal that one can understand the behavior of an individual or group in a given situation.

In Chapter 3 I present a model covering all aspects of behavior that determine the fighting potential of an individual or group. As stated above, this model is based on the appraisal process that, stage by stage, deals with the perceived environment—as well as on the internal perceptions leading to the final perception that, together with the objective parameters of the situation, determines the actual combat performance. This is a theoretical and often speculative chapter, but is aimed at offering a coherent structure on the basis of which some known findings and observations can be integrated.

It is not sufficient to appraise a situation as one that you understand, consider relevant, and feel you can handle. You must also have the need, drive, or desire to do so. Individuals with identical appraisals of a situation might differ in their combat readiness, because of this difference in the underlying willingness to get involved or committed to conflict. This underlying drive is often expressed as aggression, and Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to this concept. Chapter 4 briefly summarizes some of the literature and offers a model for classifying aggression. Chapter 5 goes into the origins of aggression and its evaluation. This chapter is not an essential part of this book. It is offered as background and interesting speculation. However, the reader may skip over it without affecting his or her understanding of the rest of the book.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to an explanation of what an enemy is: different ways that environment can be perceived and evaluated as “an enemy” and the effect that such an evaluation can have on behavior (that is, what or whom will the aggressive drive be directed at?).

Chapter 7 is concerned with the nature of courage—both in the eye of the beholder (that is, the social norms of heroism and medal awards), and in terms of the hero (that is, the motivations and perceptions behind heroic acts). In a way, this chapter addresses the question “Does this concern me?” for it describes the emotional involvement or committal that an individual has to a situation and that leads him to unusual or heroic acts.

Chapter 8, which discusses discipline, is an adjunct to the chapter on courage. While courage is seen as involving behavior that is unconventional and unusual, discipline confines behavior to predetermined and fixed routines. The effects of discipline—both punitive and directive—on combat efficiency is discussed and mapped. Obedience and its consequences—as well as formal and informal discipline in relationship to combat motivation—is taken up. This chapter deals with the question “What is it all about?” for it describes the framework for behavior—the norms and laws that create the structure and “make sense” of a situation.

Chapter 9 takes up some problems of assessing the psychological combat potential. It presents the results of an investigation made during the 1973 Yom Kippur War—which used conventional means as well as newly developed behavioral checklists. The chapter also presents an instrument for mapping the perception of any situation, along with some of its applications in military and nonmilitary settings.

Chapter 10 focuses on some psychological problems associated with the 1982 Lebanon War. The aim of this chapter is to analyze these problems from the point of view of the perceptual model outlined in Chapter 3.

As mentioned above, this has not been an attempt to write a strictly scientific book. My primary aim has been to stimulate, challenge, and convey ideas. I hope the reader will be able to accept the switch from formal to associative—from strictly factual to speculative. The “nothing but” syndrome

was described by Jung (1959) as that “which superficially lends an air of scientific contribution, but in the long run explains nothing.” My aim has been to describe more than to explain; but if a description is to be valid, it must lead to explanations—because of our basic need to make sense. Thus, if the reader finds this book as much a challenge to read as I found it a challenge to write, I shall be amply rewarded.

SUGGESTION FOR READING PLAN

I have aimed my writing at those who are concerned with conflict and combat in their daily life—soldiers, police, and social agents, as well as the academic who is interested in this aspect of human behavior. Thus, the book is a mixture of the abstract theoretical and the concrete practical. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are the more theoretical: The reader who would like to go directly to the more concrete part could delay reading them until he has read the rest of the book. Then, hopefully, he will go back to these chapters and find the conceptual basis for what he has already read.

2

The Perception of Conflict and Combat

PERCEPTION OF BATTLE IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

"What are you here for?" I was often asked this question by soldiers and officers of the units I visited in the field. Answering—as any psychologist worth his salt would answer—"What do *you* think I am here for?" produced most frequently, "To help us overcome fear, to function better." (Of course, there were always some soldiers who thought I was the best pipeline for psychiatric discharge, but I do not wish to discuss them in the context of this book.) My initial assumption was that the soldiers would be most concerned with their combat ability; but I soon discovered that, as often as not, they were concerned with their ability to cope with more mundane issues.

There are enough peacetime problems—from physical stresses to military police, from loneliness to boredom—that are difficult to handle. Even during a war, only a relatively small portion of the time is spent in actual combat with the enemy—and less so during routine military service where real war and active engagements are comparatively rare, if not totally absent. For different persons in the same situation, there might well be different problems to cope with. Obviously, the platoon commander has different problems—and thus, a different perception of the problems of his platoon—than the private in the same platoon. But it is equally likely that two privates in the same platoon at the same time will have different perceptions of their problems within the platoon. One might have difficulty in tackling the physical demands and the constant physical pressure, and can just manage to keep up with the training; the other finds the physical demands very easy and not strainful, but finds the problems of social relationship—integration within the group—very difficult and most stressful.