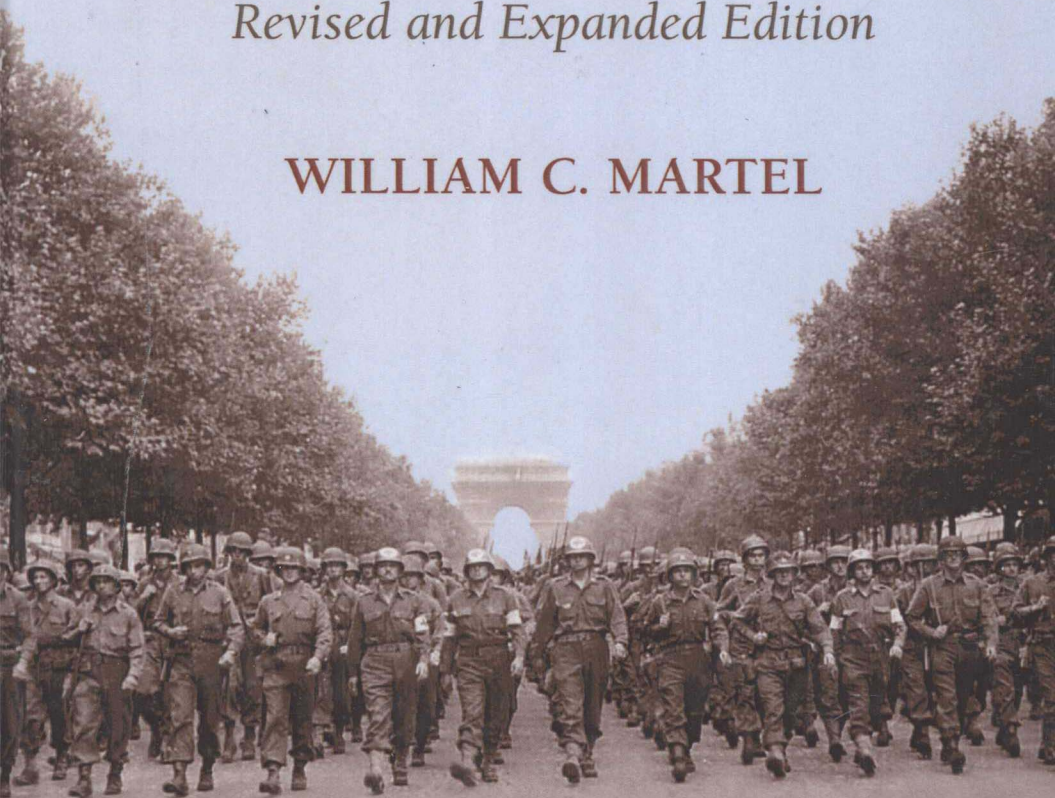


VICTORY IN WAR

Foundations of Modern Strategy
Revised and Expanded Edition

WILLIAM C. MARTEL





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FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN STRATEGY

REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

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The Fletcher School, Tufts University



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War demands that scholars and policymakers use *victory* in precise and coherent terms to communicate what the state seeks to achieve in war. The historic failure to define *victory* in consistent terms has contributed to confused debates when societies consider whether to wage war. This volume explores the development of a theoretical narrative or language of victory to help scholars and policymakers define carefully and precisely what they mean and to thereby achieve a deeper understanding of victory as the foundation of strategy in the modern world.

William C. Martel is Associate Professor of International Security Studies at The Fletcher School at Tufts University. His research and teaching interests are international security and public policy. Formerly a Professor of National Security Affairs at the Naval War College, he also served on the professional staff of the RAND Corporation in Washington, DC. He has been an advisor to the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, U.S. Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, and the National Security Council and is academic director of the Fletcher Summer Institute for the Advanced Study of Nonviolent Conflict.

To my wife, Dianne

I have been thinking about you a lot lately, and how much I love you. I have been thinking about the way you look at me, and how much I love you. I have been thinking about the way you smile at me, and how much I love you. I have been thinking about the way you laugh at me, and how much I love you. I have been thinking about the way you hug me, and how much I love you. I have been thinking about the way you kiss me, and how much I love you. I have been thinking about the way you hold my hand, and how much I love you. I have been thinking about the way you support me, and how much I love you. I have been thinking about the way you encourage me, and how much I love you. I have been thinking about the way you love me, and how much I love you.

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It was asserted not long ago by a prominent American that "war's very object is victory" and that "in war there can be no substitute for victory." Perhaps the confusion here lies in what is meant by the term "victory." Perhaps the term is actually misplaced. Perhaps there can be such a thing as "victory" in a battle, whereas in war there can be only the achievement or nonachievement of your objectives. In the old days, wartime objectives were generally limited and practical ones, and it was common to measure the success of your military operations by the extent to which they brought you closer to your objectives. But where your objectives are moral and ideological ones and run to changing the attitudes and traditions of an entire people or the personality of a regime, then victory is probably something not to be achieved entirely by military means or indeed in any short space of time at all; and perhaps that is the source of our confusion.

— George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, Expanded Edition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 102

Preface

The image of American forces marching in Paris in 1944 evokes the very essence of what most people think of as a victory in war. Yet in the context of Afghanistan, General David Petraeus said, “This is not a case where . . . you go home to a victory parade.”¹ His comment raises a crucial point for scholars, policymakers, and the public: what if we live in an era in which some wars no longer end in a decisive fashion? What if the concept of “victory” oversimplifies the range of successful outcomes that wars are meant to achieve? More critically, what if its meaning is so diffuse that societies are confused about what it means to achieve victory?

Despite all the work that has been done on theories and strategies of war, the concept of victory is not a transparent term in the language of strategy, diplomacy, security, and war. Ultimately, what is missing is a systematic framework – a theoretical narrative, as presented in this study – to help us understand what it means to attain victory.

While the term victory is used casually to express a generally successful outcome of a contest, the outcomes of all wars are not equal. Whereas the term can express the concept that one state totally defeats another state, as in World War II, it is also true that victory can express lower levels of success, such as the defeat of Panama in 1989 or Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. However, for thousands of years the literature on victory failed to provide language that allowed policymakers and citizens to describe those outcomes in precise and meaningful terms. In fact, I would argue that the intense

¹ “Petraeus: Expect No ‘Victory Parade’ in Afghanistan . . . Ever: Petraeus Casts Doubt on 2014 Afghanistan Timeline,” *Agence France Presse*, December 6, 2010.

debates about Afghanistan and Iraq were all the more contentious because there was no clear language to describe victory. Judging by the shifting results of numerous opinion polls conducted about Afghanistan and Iraq, one surely could not make the argument that the American people or their policymakers were operating under a common expectation of what victory meant in these wars.

This book conducts an analytical study of victory, relying on historical examples, to develop concepts for illuminating the fundamental meaning of victory. It seeks to help scholars and policymakers formulate more precise discussions and informed choices about military intervention. This study builds on the existing scholarly and policy literatures and, where possible, on the words, whether spoken or written, of the principal policymakers who contributed to decisions about using military force in their search for the right kind of victory at a particular moment in history.

Since the first edition of this book was published in 2007, events in Afghanistan and Iraq reaffirmed that the problem of victory would not soon disappear from the political debate. It became obvious to me that further thinking about the theoretical framework for victory would be helpful to those who rightly ask why the state goes to war and what it hopes to achieve when it does so.

I am indebted to the many individuals who contributed to this work. First, I would like to thank a number of colleagues at The Fletcher School, especially Professor Antonia Chayes, whose encouragement, enthusiasm, and intellectual vigor were a constant source of inspiration. I also would like to express my appreciation to Professors Robert Pfaltzgraff, Jr., and Richard Shultz whose wisdom, support, and friendship contributed in many important ways to this and other endeavors. I also would like to thank Peter Ackerman, Marc Genest, John Maurer, Hew Strachan, and Geoffrey Wawro for their most helpful suggestions and encouragement. A special note of thanks goes to Dipali Mukhopadhyay, who recently completed her doctorate at Fletcher, for her detailed review and analysis, which were invaluable in helping me prepare this new edition. I also want to thank several graduate students at Fletcher, in particular Sarah Schaffer, Sean Duggan, Jeff Bryan, and Peter Rough, as well as Paul Nadeau, all of whom made many important contributions to this work. I am also indebted to several anonymous reviewers whose critical comments and suggestions helped to sharpen the arguments and logic of this study.

An enduring note of gratitude goes to my editor at Cambridge University Press, John Berger, whose interest and support were instrumental in writing this and the initial study. I am deeply appreciative to John, who gave me the time and freedom to finish this project, and whose wisdom and judgment

were always so helpful. I also want to express my thanks to my copy editors, Barbara Walthall and Connie Burt, for their unfailing attention to matters of logic, expression, and detail.

A final note of thanks goes to my wife, Dianne, for her support and encouragement.

Despite the help from these individuals, it is not possible to avoid a simple axiom: whatever shortcomings exist in this work are mine alone.

William C. Martel
Medford, Massachusetts
February 2011



VICTORY IN WAR

REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

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1

Introduction

When I finished the manuscript for the previous edition of *Victory in War* in the summer of 2006, the United States was fighting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These wars, particularly the case of Iraq, ignited fierce domestic debates about the reasons for intervention; whether policymakers had an exit strategy; and, ultimately, whether the United States could win and at what cost. One explanation for the complicated debates about the decisions to intervene in Iraq and Afghanistan was persistent confusion about what victory means, how we define it, and whether U.S. society is willing to bear the costs to attain it, particularly in the face of a determined insurgency and significant American casualties. Since 2001, more than five thousand Americans have died in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹ As I argued in the earlier edition of this book, the central challenge for scholars and policymakers is to define clearly and precisely what victory is and what it means for the state.

Historically, scholars and policymakers have failed to develop a theoretical framework that relates victory to real-world decisions about whether and under what circumstances it is prudent for the state to use military force. This failure was expressed by Andrew Bacevich when he noted that policymakers do not have “*the foggiest notion of what victory would look like, how it would be won, and what it might cost . . .*”² The revised and expanded edition of this book fills a major gap in our theoretical and practical knowledge about the meaning of victory. Building on an analysis of how strategists and theorists have treated the strategy and practice of victory throughout millennia, this study develops a theoretical narrative to organize more systematically our thinking about victory. It examines the evolution of the theory and practice

of victory in U.S. politics, uses a series of case studies to evaluate the outcome when the United States used military force, applies this framework to consider how different categories of military force relate to victory, and concludes with thoughts on crucial questions for scholars and policymakers who contemplate the theoretical and practical significance of victory.

To develop this theoretical narrative of victory, this revised and expanded edition advances the principal arguments about victory studied in the initial volume. The central challenge for any contemporary analysis of victory is and will remain to examine what happens in the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq as well as in the broader “war against extremism.”³ By building on the analysis in the previous edition, this current study reexamines how developments in Afghanistan and Iraq influence debates among scholars, policymakers, and the public about the costs, benefits, and risks of intervention. However, the broader question remains the relationship between the use of force and the principles behind the meaning of victory.

CENTRAL QUESTIONS

This book explores four central questions about victory that are critical to the scholarship on strategy and security and to policymakers who confront practical decisions about military intervention.

First: Why is it important to have a coherent definition of victory? The fundamental reason that this is essential is to provide a statement of the state’s goals in terms of outcomes when it uses force. Establishing clearly what victory means is the first step in specifying precisely what policymakers seek to achieve. It also provides a measure of their commitment to those goals and whether and for how long they are willing to support that policy. Because the decision to achieve short-term victories is distinctly different from seeking transformative victories, defining victory provides a more accurate sense for policymakers and the public of how long it will take to achieve victory, the costs in lives and national treasure, and the risks when the state confronts such decisions. Last, a definition of victory helps to mobilize public support for the decision to intervene and thus build a domestic consensus – or to identify when no such consensus exists and adapt policy accordingly.

Second: Who should determine how victory is defined? Policymakers have the primary responsibility for determining what victory means, how to define it, what the state seeks to achieve, and how precisely the use of military force will meet those goals. Policymakers also have the greatest influence because they make the decision to use force, establish the guidelines that will govern what intervention should achieve, and determine how and for how

long it will be conducted. In practice, policymakers are responsible for translating strategic goals into the policy that governs how military commanders use military force. Policymakers – who comprise, by necessity, the group with the greatest responsibility for determining how to define victory – operate directly on the frontline of any decision to use force. However, policymakers must do this in full consultation with others in government – such as the legislative branch and the military – as well as in coordination with allies involved in military intervention. This is especially true because policymakers should aspire to establish policies that reflect broad agreement on the conduct of joint military operations.

In studying who defines victory, we cannot forget the role of scholars in determining what it means to achieve victory; whether policymakers have clearly defined what they seek to achieve; and whether those goals were accomplished. Scholars also have a decisive role in identifying the successes and failures as policymakers translate a strategy for victory into effective policies. That being said, however, there always will be tension between the more immediate and practical role of policymakers and the longer-term analytic role of scholars.

Third: What are the possible consequences of the failure to define the conditions that govern victory? A fundamental consequence is that failure may contribute to the loss of public support, particularly when military intervention confronts difficulties. For democracies, the state's ability to sustain public support builds directly on defining, from the outset, what policymakers mean by victory, what costs it will impose on the state, and whether the public supports the policy. Another consequence of the failure to define victory is that policymakers may lose control over the policy narrative as they face inevitable setbacks. Although the precise relationship is ambiguous, the failure to define victory could erode public support when the state is being drawn into a quagmire and possible defeat. If the public does not know what victory means, how long it will take, and what cost it will exact, the nature of the public debate will reinforce and magnify any perceptions of failure. By defining victory, policymakers can communicate the extent of their resolve and determination to win while minimizing the risk that others will call their resolve to win into question. A further hurdle in defining victory is that policymakers must exhibit the requisite political resolve while also leaving room for reinterpretation when the state experiences setbacks. Last, the failure to define the conditions that constitute victory may suggest that policymakers have underestimated what is necessary for victory in view of the risks of intervention.

Fourth: What is the relationship between the concept of victory and the responsibilities assumed by the state for postconflict reconstruction? A serious

shortcoming in analyses of victory is the failure of scholars and policymakers to give serious and detailed attention to the implications of victory for the state's postconflict obligations. Historically, the problem is that scholars and policymakers focused on the means necessary to achieve victory but failed to consider the obligations imposed on the state when victory is achieved. In contemporary politics, the meaning of victory determines directly and consequentially the postconflict tasks for which the state assumes responsibility – unless it chooses to abandon the defeated and leave them in a state of chaos, which is politically difficult in the modern era. By arguing that the decision to pursue higher levels of victory establishes correspondingly greater levels of postconflict tasks for the victor, this book elevates the importance of these obligations in understanding victory. As events in Iraq and Afghanistan suggest, this is an area of critical and growing importance in the study of victory.

THE STATE OF THE ART ON VICTORY

Two recent events have made victory central to the contemporary debate about national security. The first is the war in Afghanistan. In October 2001, just weeks after the attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush ordered the invasion of Afghanistan to remove the Taliban from power and deny al Qaeda safe haven in the country. Although the objective was to destroy the sources of terrorism that had operated with impunity under the protection of the repressive Taliban regime, the fact that the Taliban insurgency continues in force ten years later undermines what victory means. The second event is the war in Iraq. In March 2003, the United States invaded Iraq to defeat and remove the government of Saddam Hussein. On May 1, 2003, President Bush declared from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended” and that “the United States and our allies have *prevailed*” in the war against Iraq.⁴ The unresolved question is how to interpret whether the outcomes in these two events are consistent with victory.

Despite initial victories in Afghanistan and Iraq, more than ten and eight years, respectively, since the end of major hostilities, approximately fifty thousand U.S. troops are still deployed in Iraq and one hundred thousand are deployed in Afghanistan. During the height of the Iraqi insurgency in 2006–7, thousands of U.S. troops and Iraqis died, and the number of insurgent attacks in Afghanistan continued to increase while the policy community focused on events in Iraq. With the additional U.S. forces deployed in 2007 as part of the Iraq Surge, the subsequent decline of the civil war in Iraq, and the signing of the Status of Forces Agreement in November 2008, there arguably are early signs that a degree of stability may emerge in Iraq – but this

is highly speculative. Although the United States plans to withdraw all forces from Iraq by the end of December 2011, the violence in Iraq continues – albeit on lesser levels.⁵ In Afghanistan, however, the situation has worsened as increasing levels of violence raise questions about the U.S. strategy and prospects for victory.⁶

For several years, U.S. domestic politics was consumed by passionate debates about the wisdom of the decision to invade Iraq and the criticism that policymakers ignored the problem of Afghanistan. Such a debate is not foreign to U.S. politics, as seen in the case of the Vietnam War and general debates about American interventionism.⁷ The Afghan and Iraqi insurgencies provoked a debate about what it means when policymakers seek victory in such wars. With the end of the Bush administration and the beginning of the Obama administration, U.S. policy has shifted regarding Afghanistan and Iraq. In early 2011, conditions in Iraq were moving on a positive trajectory, whereas in Afghanistan, pessimism about victory was growing – as one observer noted, “Every aspect of the war . . . is going badly.”⁸ The consensus is that the United States does not seem to be winning, and the matter is complicated by the fact that scholars and policymakers seem uncertain about what victory would mean given the nation-building project in Afghanistan, questions about the future of the Taliban, and Pakistan’s influence on the Afghan situation. This study seeks to add clarity to these debates.

At a time when the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are occupying a prominent role in U.S. politics, civilian and military policymakers must ask difficult and uncomfortable questions about victory: What does victory mean? Are there different types or levels of victory? Does victory require capturing territory or destroying (and subsequently reconstructing) a society? How long does it take to achieve victory? How do we know when victory has been achieved? Do postwar conditions have a positive or negative influence on victory and how do we judge it? Does the passage of time dilute what victory means? Still other questions arise: Will the United States achieve victory in Afghanistan and Iraq and, if so, what type of victory? Does an insurgency erode victory? What do the initial victories in Afghanistan and Iraq mean if these states are consumed by insurgencies and fragment into civil wars? Finally, what does it mean if the state achieves victory in war but loses the peace?

The details of these wars and their implications for the study of victory will be debated among scholars and policymakers for generations. Although there is a temptation to frame these questions in political terms by assigning blame or praise to the efforts of policymakers, doing so obscures a vastly more important issue: Questions about what constitutes victory and what we mean by it are long-standing and essentially nonpartisan issues that generations of

strategists and policymakers have confronted unsuccessfully. Now more than ever, these issues require serious study and they are precisely the problems examined in this book.

Facing debates about military intervention, the central question addressed by this study is deceptively simple yet immensely important: What precisely does it mean for the state to achieve victory in war? One issue is that no realm of social, political, economic, or cultural affairs is immune from our tendency to use the term *victory* to describe outcomes that are generally successful or, at least, consistent with the state's or organization's goals and policies. The evidence for analytical and methodological problems of how scholars and policymakers use *victory* is in part inferential: How exactly could this one term be used universally to describe such a wide range of outcomes without sacrificing its precision? Why have strategists and theorists failed to define what *victory* means – given that the term is used universally in the language of strategy, diplomacy, policy, business, and war to mean success? From partial accomplishments to total successes, *victory* is used reflexively as a synonym to express the judgment that the outcome is consistent with one's aspirations. Because the analytic foundations of victory are inadequate for describing the complex conditions, outcomes, and risks that scholars and policymakers ordinarily associate with war, this study develops concepts and language that will help them use the term *victory* with greater precision when states use military force.

TOWARD SYSTEMATIC THINKING ON VICTORY

In the midst of confusion in the scholarship about victory, this study confronts two fundamental issues. The first is that we do not have a precise language or theory that permits scholars, civilian and military policymakers, and the public to agree on what victory means, when it is attained, or when the state fails to achieve it. The second issue entails the examination of what a theory of victory would look like, how it is distinct from military strategy or a theory of war, what scholars and policymakers would gain by developing one, and how such a theory would contribute to debates about war. This study of victory provides the basis for more systematic answers to these and other questions.

One way to begin the search for systematic ideas or theories of victory is to evaluate the historical scholarship on strategy and war. For thousands of years, strategists and theorists developed many ideas and principles about what is the proper configuration of military forces that is necessary to defeat an enemy. There are voluminous writings in the field of military strategy on the proper principles and practices that states should use to produce successful outcomes in battle or war. In addition, for 2,500 years, strategic