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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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thinkers have sought to develop actionable concepts – perhaps even a theory of war – to help political and military leaders understand whether to conduct war and how to win when they do so. However, it is startling to realize that for thousands of years, strategists and theorists have searched for a theory of war and discussed such broader concepts as tactical or strategic victory *but have failed to produce a systematic framework that explains what victory means.* That this is a serious failure on the part of the scholarship on strategy and security is an understatement.

For generations, scholars and policymakers produced a substantial literature on the nature of strategy and its implications for victory in war (see Chapters 3 and 4).[9] Although the literature discusses victory at length, it fails to develop a coherent, systematic, theoretical narrative or typology that answers the questions posed previously in this study about victory. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the consensus among theorists was that victory is not a meaningful concept or achievable in any practical sense when states possess nuclear weapons. As Kenneth Waltz wrote in *Man, the State, and War*, "[I]n wars there is no victory but only varying degrees of defeat[, a] proposition that has gained increasing acceptance in the twentieth century."[10] As a result, scholars and policymakers use the term *victory* without a systematic framework beyond the implicit assumption that the unalloyed purpose of strategy is to achieve victory in war. Neither do we have a systematic theory or literature of victory that is distinct from theories of war, strategy, and politics.

To resolve the gap that exists between the theory and practice of victory, the first step in this study is to develop a theoretical narrative of victory that is informed by observations from the literature on strategy and case studies of war and intervention. Although policymakers, scholars, and historians have grappled for millennia with the issue of victory, their work has focused on the principal questions of *how* to win: Which configuration of military and political resources should the state marshal? What is the ideal balance between the offense and defense? What are the proper tactics? This focus on the more mechanical aspects of *how* to win obscured the more fundamental issue for the state: *What* precisely does victory mean? Without systematic answers to the question of what it means to be victorious, scholars and policymakers will continue to struggle with whether it is prudent for the state to go to war, or what level of resources and commitment the state should devote to war – to mention only the more prominent questions.

The literature on strategy focuses primarily on the conditions that produce success or failure, triumph or defeat in war. However, like all political phenomena, wars involve complex human and physical interactions that do not readily reduce to the binary categories of "winning" and "losing." In reality, such outcomes exist on a distribution that ranges from total success

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to complete failure. Whereas this study argues that the concept of victory means the state achieves some of its strategic, political, military, territorial, and economic objectives, the broader point is that the outcome of wars – which we know as "victory" – should be interpreted and expressed as a range of gradations that signal the extent to which the outcome is consistent with the state's objectives. The enduring issue with how scholars and policymakers use the word *victory* was expressed by the German strategist Carl von Clausewitz, who wrote in *On War* that "it is a want in our terminology that for a victory over the enemy tantamount to a rout, and a conquest of the enemy only tantamount to a simple victory, there is only one and the same word to use."[11] Clausewitz also wrote that "No one starts a war . . . without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to achieve it."[12] This study provides greater analytic rigor and clarity for scholars and policymakers who struggle with defining these questions about victory.

That being said, scholars and policymakers use *victory* and *winning* synonymously to describe the outcome when the fighting stops and the war is "won." However, as evidenced in Iraq for eight years, proclaiming the end of military operations does not mean that the state successfully achieved its objectives in war – far from it. Historically, victory was defined to express the judgment that the state achieved its basic political objectives in war; this study, however, presents the argument that victory has broader, more complex, and more subtle meanings. This includes whether the state achieves its tactical and strategic goals, whether the outcome alters the status quo, and what are the economic and social costs of mobilization and the scale of postconflict obligations imposed on the victor.[13] Because victory is meaningful only when it is expressed as a distribution or continuum of outcomes, this theoretical narrative uses discrete levels of victory to describe war outcomes as well as aspirations.

To align a theoretical analysis of victory with the rules of social science, the literature on victory must be reinterpreted so that the *results* of wars can be categorized more precisely to express the complex range of outcomes that naturally occur. Missing from the literature on strategy is a systematic framework for analyzing theoretically what victory means in terms of outcomes, which is distinct from a theory of war or a science of military strategy. It would be useful if a theoretical framework for debating the meaning of victory forced scholars and policymakers to discuss in a more orderly and logical manner the costs and benefits of victory for the state and what policymakers are willing to commit to achieve it. Such systematic thinking would diminish the more heated public debates about the wisdom of intervention because it would establish broad agreement on what the state plans to achieve, what those achievements are likely to cost, and their relationship to victory. With a better

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explanation of what victory means for outcomes in war, policymakers and the public will be better prepared to engage in serious debates about the state's commitment. Furthermore, it would describe to foes and allies alike the state's level of commitment and its plans for achieving victory. By developing more precise language for victory and making the discussion more transparent, this study sharpens the debate about what victory means.[14]

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK AND AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

This theoretical narrative helps scholars and policymakers evaluate what it means to achieve victory in war and how we should interpret it.[15] To reach preliminary answers to these questions, this research is organized in several discrete arguments about the historical and contemporary origins of *victory*, its various meanings, and the ways in which it is used. It offers two preliminary answers to the question of what it means to achieve *victory*: (1) the term connotes far more than a general desire on the state's part to achieve its political objectives; and (2) it can be described in terms of discrete categories about positive outcomes when the state uses military force to achieve success.

To advance this line of research, Chapter 2 outlines a theoretical narrative of victory. Rather than define *victory* – as so many have before – in such vague terms as *success*, *decisiveness*, *winning*, or any other among myriad synonyms, this study proposes to use three specific levels of victory as the fundamental lexicon for strategy and war: *tactical victory, strategic victory*, and *grand strategic victory*. After specifying the level of victory in war, the study examines the types of change in the prevailing political conditions that victory may produce. It argues that the use of force may modify an adversary's policies, defeat its ability to conduct war, alter its institutional and economic foundations, or – in the extreme case – lead to regime change and a wholesale change in the government and economy. In this study, the first two outcomes are referred to as *limited changes* in the status quo and the latter two as *comprehensive* and *transformative changes*. Defining victory as both an aspiration and an outcome has equally important implications for how the state mobilizes for war. When policymakers aspire to achieve higher levels of victory, it likely influences the state's level of mobilization. In one case, the state could pursue a *limited* mobilization of its military forces or domestic public support. By contrast, it could *extensively* mobilize its economic and industrial sources of power, commit large numbers of ground forces, and operate with allies as part of an international coalition.[16]

Finally, the implications of victory as an outcome are discussed in terms of *postconflict obligations* imposed on the victorious state. The argument in this

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study is that these obligations are as central to victory as successful combat operations or mobilizing the state for war. In modern politics, victory may require the victor to provide economic aid and developmental assistance, occupy the defeated society, or reconstruct the defeated state's infrastructure that was destroyed. For examples, consider the cases of Germany and Japan after World War II and the more recent cases of Afghanistan and Iraq. To fulfill its postconflict obligations, the state may establish new systems and institutions of democratic governance as well as train new military and security forces to prevent the resurgence of conditions that led to war. As described in this study, such obligations range from *limited* to *protracted*.

The historical analyses in Chapters 3 and 4 examine the critical theorists, strategists, and scholars who have made significant contributions to the meaning of victory in terms of its historical and philosophical evolution in the military-strategy and diplomacy literature. Chapter 3 begins the analysis with strategists from ancient China, Greece, Rome, and the Renaissance; Chapter 4 continues the study by focusing on strategists in the modern era. What emerges from this review and analysis is that although many ideas about victory have been formulated, strategists and scholars have failed to define precisely, systematically, or transparently what *victory* means for describing outcomes or aspirations. I argue that this literature failed to develop a coherent and unambiguous set of ideas for expressing what victory means.

Chapter 5 examines how U.S. experiences with war during the last two centuries shaped the role and evolution of victory in U.S. strategy. Since the late-eighteenth century, U.S. wars have fit into a broader narrative on how the state uses military force to achieve victory. Chapter 5 examines the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War in terms of the U.S. approach to victory in its major wars. Building on an analysis of how these conflicts influenced the U.S. practice of victory, Chapter 6 then develops the concept that the United States has defined a discrete, distinct, and enduring logic of victory. It explores how unconditional surrender has had a decisive role in U.S. strategic thinking in terms of how it conducts wars and what it seeks to accomplish. Chapter 6 concludes with an analysis of the victor's obligations and responsibilities in the context of the U.S. logic of victory.

Chapters 7 through 12 present a series of methodologically diverse qualitative case studies of U.S. military interventions conducted between 1986 and 2011. These cases encompass a wide range of contingencies: At the more destructive, high-intensity end of the spectrum, the United States used military force against Iraq in the 1991 Persian Gulf War and again in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. At the lower end of more selective military operations, the United States used force in the 1986 air strike on Libya, the 1989 invasion

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