VICTORY IN WAR
REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

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.

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VICTORY IN WAR
FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN STRATEGY
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To my wife, Dianne
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.

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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

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 support, wisdom, 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
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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.

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February 2011