

# **STRATEGIC ANALYSIS**



# THE MEANING OF MILITARY VICTORY. IN SEARCH OF A NEW ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Robert KUPIECKI<sup>1</sup>

In my essay I wish to take up the concept of military victory in the context of current scholarly debate on the subject, focusing on the research problems, emerging areas of consensus and diverging views. A few outstanding studies<sup>2</sup> set the tone for many more publications on the subject. They suggest a theoretical approach to the issue, intending to inform policies of democratic governments about how to transform victory into long-term political benefits. It is so because, the goals for which wars are fought can only be understood if they are perceived in a broader context, extending beyond the very act of violence<sup>3</sup>. The “victory theory”, emphasizing the dynamics of the problem, the perception element, flexible relations between (changeable) war objectives and its actual results, encourages more research into the conditions that will guarantee permanent and optimal termination of military conflicts.

<sup>1</sup> Associate professor at the National Security Department of the National Defense Academy in Warsaw. Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of National Defense of Poland. The text contains the author’s personal opinions exclusively.

<sup>2</sup> See especially: R. Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder 2006., W.C. Martel, *Victory In War. Foundations of Modern Military Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007., Martel, *Victory In War. Foundations of Modern Strategy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011., I. Bickerton, *The Illusion of Victory. The True Costs of War*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 2011., C. Gray, *Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory*, Carlisle Barracks 2002, US Army War College, [www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display/cfm?pubid=272](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display/cfm?pubid=272), pp. 11–13, May 2009., B. Bond, *The Pursuit of Victory. From Napoleon to Saddam Hussein*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998., J. Angstrom, I. Duvesteyn (red.), *Understanding Victory and Defeat in Contemporary War*, Routledge, London 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Fred C. Ikle, *Every War Must End*, Columbia University Press, New York 1991, p. 14.

## Points of reference

Let's start with a few general questions: Did Poland win World War II? After all it was a part of the victorious coalition. But the consequences of this victory were ambiguous, producing a much lower starting point in the aftermath of 1989, than for its war allies and even for the losing side - Germany. Did the USA lose the Vietnam War? It was not a military defeat. But the government lost public support for the military activity, and the signed truce evoked a long-lasting trauma for the generation of American politicians, soldiers and society. However after forty years since the war in Vietnam ended, the country itself and its relations with the USA remain stable. In May 2003 president George W. Bush declared victory in the war against Iraq, in which Poland also took part (*mission accomplished*). The tactical and operational military objectives had been achieved: the enemy was crushed, its territory and capital occupied. But the old war transformed into a new one, with new rules of engagement and new players. After the US President had declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq, over 8 thousand American and coalition troops and tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians were killed. The response of the public has changed, which influenced American operational decisions and politics. Then, the international military operation in Afghanistan has been the longest-ever military conflict for America – and, in the most recent era, for Poland, too. So what describes victory in this conflict? Apart from the definitional morass – is the “war with terrorism” to be won at all? What is the relation between the way western civilization perceives victory and its reflection among our opponents? The answer to these questions can be strongly determined by the way we want to understand military victory.

Modern perspective on the issue is broader than viewing war as a simple instrument of politics of “now and here”, and of defeating the opponent on the battlefield. Thomas Schelling thought that: “the term *victory* does not adequately describe what the public expects from the country's armed forces /.../ The way we can use the military victory for our own national, or even broader interest, is of the same value as the winning itself /.../”<sup>4</sup>. Scientific research of the last two decades places this problem at the very heart of modern military conflict analysis. It also draws

4 T. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1966, p 31.

from the critical insight into military history. It does not deny the achievements in the field of science and the art of war, but is far from the traditional restricting of the research field to the “way of winning battles and campaigns”<sup>5</sup>. The postulate has been put forward that through scientific and objective results analysis, synthetic methodological database of the “victory theory” can be created.

Most research in this field actually describes the utility of wars as states’ strategic instruments in achieving their political goals. It also focuses on peace treaties and the sources of changes in international relations. And even if “political actions expressed through the acts of violence” are invariably going to lead to victory, the methods and the context, in which we interpret the long-lasting outcome of a war are all changing. Contemporary researchers don’t view the victory as the end to a war, but as a moment at which the winning side faces the question how to best use the newly won power over the defeated opponent. They also investigate into the field of politics, diplomatic relations, time factor and public opinion. The winner’s decision (domination, resignation, self restriction) determines the shape of the new post-war international order. Of course, it does matter how decisively and who has won the war, but also who and when judges its outcome in a subjective manner. What results from military victory? What changes does it bring to the fighting nations, to the region, international relations? What is the relation between the outcome and initially declared objectives of the war? Are they flexible and can they shift our expectations as far as the shape of the victory is concerned? Is it possible to win and lose at the same time? What matrix to apply when rating the victory and how to improve the results of war? What is the price of overly superficial approaches to victory or of abusing them?

It was already Jan Gottlieb Bloch, a 19<sup>th</sup> century pacifist and visionary of the “contemporary war”, who noticed both human and material costs of winning modern wars. The potential and innovation of the age of industry got applied for that purpose<sup>6</sup>. In his study, based on the analysis of social, political, economic

5 This trend in research is also widely represented in modern publications on war, see: Ch. P. Potholm, *Winning the War. Seven Keys to Military Victory Throughout History*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Boulder 2010., Stephen Biddle, *Military Power. Explaining Victory and Defeat on Modern Battle*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2004.

6 See. J.G. Bloch, *Future War in Technology, Economics and Politics*, / *Przyszła wojna pod względem technicznym, ekonomicznym i politycznym*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warsaw 2005.

factors, and also those connected with international relations, the victories were no longer even to be considered *pyrrhic* ones, but simply impossible to reach at all.

However, it was the *nuclear* strategy luminaries that actually laid down the intellectual foundations for contemporary reflection on the meaning of military victory. The scholars (and political practitioners) of the period – Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger<sup>7</sup>, Klaus Knorr, Bernard Brodie, Arnold Wohlstetter, William Kaufmann, Herman Kahn, Thomas Schelling, and, in broader context, Raymond Aron and Kenneth Waltz, have not just created intellectual framework of the nuclear strategy, but also introduced some ambiguity into the very concept of victory in a such a conflict. Due to their propositions, politics in general had to find its way more into the area of defence/deterrence strategy and the improvement of peace. They did not *de facto* rule out the concept of military victory in a nuclear war, but they acknowledged that it cannot be adequately applied to describe what follows it. They were looking for more depth and understanding of the issue in the strategy of deterrence – the combination of military, economic, social, technological, educational, political and diplomatic means and solutions. What connects the “victory theoreticians” of the Cold War era with their modern followers, is the way they describe the victory through extensive research results, time factor, and separation from the actual war termination moment.

Contemporary wars have often been clashes between states and their coalitions with non-state agents. With different cultural background, operating in diverse understandings of time and space logic, with no democratic provision for legitimate activities, and not scared off by technologically or financially/materially stronger enemy. Contrary to classic wars – when an uniformed opponent represented and fought in the name of his/her country and according to some established rules of warfare. Today’s fighter frequently does not identify himself or herself with any authority whatsoever, has unclear goals and will often choose death over life. This fact must influence the perception of a victory and a failure. Success can be measured with positive things, such as periods of time without acts of violence, brutal attacks or the renewal of fighting. But it is hard to describe it within the

<sup>7</sup> See also: C.S. Grey, *Nuclear Strategy. The Case for Theory of Victory*, “International Security”, No 1, Summer 1979, pp. 54–87.

categories of national strategy or foreign policy, where a victory must constitute a clear and measurable sense of profit and well-being for the citizens.

The research material is mostly based on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where winning over an armed enemy did not bring about a conventionally understood victory, the enemy has changed over the time of war, and the goals had to be modified accordingly to the changes in the overall situation. There has appeared a pressing challenge to transform the battlefield success into the long-lasting, permanent political victory. Richard Holbrooke<sup>8</sup>, an outstanding American diplomat and negotiator, did predict that problem while reflecting on the meanders of discussions on victory in modern military conflicts. He thought that in treating victory as a basis for the realization of long-term post-war goals, “here and now” one can only talk about its acceptable scale<sup>9</sup> or call it in another way.<sup>10</sup> Building his reflections on *decisive victory* Colin S. Gray proves that this concept has to be supported with the ideas of *strategic success* and *strategic advantage*. In his own words these three terms “comprise a simple three-level view of relative military achievement”<sup>11</sup>.

**8** His opinion on war in Afghanistan: „.../this war will not end with an unquestionable victory declared on board of a warship, or a new Dayton just like the war in Bosnia/.../ It is going to have a different type of closure, probably in form of some sort of truce or treaty, but we cannot, obviously, sign a truce with Al-Qaida. /.../ We do not use the word *victory*, instead we talk about *success*”, see: [www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LDE6550.htm](http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LDE6550.htm), June 2011.

**9** See also: T. Franks, S. Biddle, P.Ch. Choharis, J.M. Owen, D. Pipes, G. Rosenau, D. Zakheim, *Is This Victory?*, “The National Interest” 20/10/2006, [www.nationalinterest.org/article](http://www.nationalinterest.org/article), March 30 2012.

**10** Strategic studies use the term “military victory”, “wartime success”, “termination of war”. But each of these terms seem to associate victory with defeating the opponent in battlefield, depriving it of the will to build up resistance and forcing in the capitulation conditions. These terms don’t reveal much about the world that emerges from the Clausewitz *fog of war* and the usefulness of that political instrument for obtaining conditions better than those proceeding the outbreak of the military conflict. In the world, where total destruction of the enemy and conquering it are in denial, this “better peace” must become the domain not only for the victors, but for the losers, too.

**11** Gray perceives strategic victory as a uniform concept, that on the tactical level describing victorious battles, on the operational one – campaigns, strategic – wars and political – it enables the transition phase towards the post-war stabilization period. According to Gray, achieving decisive victories is possible, though not guaranteed by the technological superiority, see: C.S. Gray, *Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory*, Carlisle Barracks 2002, US Army War College, [www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display/cfm?pubid=272](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display/cfm?pubid=272), pp. 11–13, May 2009.

The “victory theory” is still “a living” subject matter for research, rather than an established scientific paradigm, or theory<sup>12</sup>. It is not surprising as strategic studies recorded a number of similar issues, around which the academic discussion is developing, for example the “alliances theory”, and the fundamental concepts of *strategy* or *security*. In the case of *victory theory* for instance, basic goal is to bring some order into the realm of terminology. It provides critical insight into the historiography of armed conflicts, but acknowledges the analysis of the past as the comparative data for the evaluation of the effects of wars of our time<sup>13</sup>. This theory doesn’t belong directly to any *school* of international relations, though it borrows state-centrism from realism, and power as a method of will expression and influence of over a state. And from liberalism – subjective approach to other actors and forms of international cooperation. The “victory theory” is highly influenced by its context, and by far it is not universal, nor will ever be constrained within widely approved rules and standards. Every type of war and every cultural context in which it is set creates its own perception of victory – it is different for classical wars between states, and also specific for nuclear or war against terrorism<sup>14</sup>.

12 For J. Boone Bartholomees, *the victory theory* is a cognitive theoretical phenomenon, within which political leaders define most effective and optimum methods of achieving military victories and transforming them into long-lasting political benefits, *Theory of Victory*, “Parameters”, Summer 2008, p. 25. Therefore, indicating a victory depends on the way we define the problem and the level of flexibility built into that definition.

13 M. Motten, ed., *Between War and Peace. How America Ends Its Wars?*, Free Press, New York 2011. Based on the experience of wars fought by America this study formulates hypothesis useful for analysing the nature of victory, like the one that victories must be viewed not through their final stages, but through the limitations; the goals of war change as the war continues, and with that so does the expectation concerning the shape of victory; opposing objectives of the sides of a conflict grow closer and closer up to a point when one can establish a cease-fire. See more.: R. J Spiller, *Six Propositions*, in: *ibid.* pp. 1–20.

14 Interesting case studies on the “victory theory” concern terrorism. For example, a British political scientist and terrorism expert Jeffrey B. Cozzens presented his analysis of “strategic thought” of the leaders of world Jihad (*Victory from the Prism of Jihadi Culture*, “Joint Forces Quarterly” 2009, no 1, pp. 86–91.). Based on that analysis he also constructed a “Jihad victory theory”, comprising six criteria that classify victory as: ability to fight forever, fulfilling a duty to fight all the non-believers as an obligation of every true Islamist, to die a martyr in the name of religion and legitimizing the martyrdom, maintaining the identity by naming and fighting the enemies, pride, unity and brotherhood of the Jihad fighters, arriving at the situation when the enemies of Islam will suffer the same like the devotees of Islam from the hand of their oppressors.

## Between the „Fogs of War and Victory”

In chapter three, volume one, of Carl von Clausewitz’s work “On War” (highly recognized by the *victory theory* researchers) the author mentions “a fog of lighter or heavier uncertainty” as a regular phenomenon accompanying the conflicted sides, resulting from the dynamic and changing nature of the war actions<sup>15</sup>. He wanted to undertake an intellectual effort that would eventually lead to introducing some order to a naturally messy area. The same postulate could be applied today to the analysis of victory. The limitations of traditional forms of war (international wars) the exposition of old, but used in a new way (asymmetric or hybrid)<sup>16</sup> methods of warfare, the evolution of accompanying goals, the ambiguity in viewing success, the time factor, which changes the way we look at the outcome of victory – all force us to ponder the issue. If war as an instrument of politics does change, so must change our thinking about victory. This problem was touched upon by many authors of classic works on the history of war, warfare and strategy.

A Chinese general Sun-Tzu was aware that even though we know how to win, we cannot control the victory. Ancient Greek historian Thucydides wrote about the frailty of Sparta success in the Peloponnesian War. A Roman historian Titus Livius put down in his work a question put forward to Hannibal by a Cartagena cavalryman – why he knows how to win a war, but is not able to use this victory. Yet another Greek historian of the Hellenistic Period – Polybius, appreciated the taste of victory after a well-led war campaign, but thought that it takes much more wisdom to make proper use of that success. He pointed out that the number of those who had won their battles is much higher than those that had been able to accurately apply the victory to their benefit. Niccolò Machiavelli understood that victory bears a number of various consequences to the victorious side. The classics of revolutionary war: Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and Leon Trotsky distinguished between the military victories and their strategic consequences for the Revolution. Basil Liddel-Hart warned against the equal treatment a real victory and reaching immediate (tactical and operational) war goals. Henry Kissinger along with other

<sup>15</sup> C. von Clausewitz, *On War*, Wydawnictwo Test, Lublin 1995 /translated by A. Cichowicz, L.W.Koc, F. Schoerner/.

<sup>16</sup> See. W Murray, P, Mansor, *Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2012.

nuclear era strategists noticed, that searching for total, complete war victory can in fact lead to a country's political stupor<sup>17</sup>.

Clausewitz himself did see the victory as more complex than just a campaign or battle result, but he did not further examine the issue<sup>18</sup>. Still, he demanded that one should know and predict what war results are to be obtained and how to measure the extent to which they are to be realized – even before the war starts. According to him, war victory is not to be understood as abstract, but as something directly related to a particular type of war. He introduced three victory assessment criteria: more material damage on the opposite side, decline in “morale” and, openly admitted, withdrawing from reaching one's own military goals. This last aspect directly invites the discussion on the essence of victory perceived as a unity with the post-war period (time of peace), and not just an end to a conflict. Seeing victory as a continuum, bridging over the moment of cease-fire and the time of peace, allows the researchers to distinguish between the paths leading to a military victory, reached through successful tactical and operational victories, and a **strategic victory** – a more complex, projected against longer, extensive period of time, often subject to open interpretation<sup>19</sup>.

In numerous academic studies, the direction of research is determined by attempts to describe military victory as a condition in which a winning country can realize its strategic goals using force and other attributes of power. From the practical

17 An excellent example of the compilation of classic authors views (historians, strategists and leaders) concerning the military victory is presented in W.C. Martel's work, *Victory In War. Foundations of Modern Military Policy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, pp. 15–82. It presents both the changes over time, and the lack of clarity of the idea as seen in various contexts of reality description and a different definition content applied by individual authors.

18 An excellent attempt at contemporary interpretation of Clausewitz's work is found in a book by B. Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warsaw 2008.

19 Military historian Brian Bond, presents in his excellent work historic (from Napoleon era to the war in Iraq) context of today's considerations on victory, pointing to two questions tied permanently to the issue. The first one is operational problem concerning the methods of reaching clear-cut victories in battlefield conditions, the second is transforming them into long-lasting, permanent political outcome. Over the period of 200 years social and technological change have changed the way wars are fought, influencing the way we perceive victory, the means of achieving it, sometimes its ephemeral and short-lived nature: B. Bond, *The Pursuit of Victory. From Napoleon to Saddam Hussein*, Oxford University Press, New York 1998, pp. 199–202.

point of view, this analysis could provide politicians with more appropriate tools to be used in international relations and defense strategy. The investigation is conducted on three layers of analysis. First – pertaining to tactics and operations (military criteria) – where the focus is on defeating the opponent in battlefield conditions or in any other form of skirmish. Second – strategic level (political and military criteria), where battlefield victory leads to the realization of the earlier established goals and the outcome is important in the following time of peace and for the regional situation. Third – grand strategy level, where victory leads to changes in global order. The researchers generally agree on the following components forming the “victory theory”:

First of all, without disregarding other opinions, it is mainly focused on the level of strategic assessment that combines the original goals with the actual results and their future consequences. It considers them in regard to internal and external aspects of the current situation of the winning side.

Second, it is looking for the connection between theory and thoughtful political decisions.

Third, it recognizes the priority of politics over war and political nature of victory, exceeding with its content and meaning beyond the horizon of military success.

Fourth – it respects geography, culture<sup>20</sup> and time as contexts in which the event is viewed.

The popular perception of victory (a changing one by nature) is considered to be a legitimizing factor for a nation’s actions and a source of its policy. Also the

**20** In the clash of cultures between the countries at war, victory will usually have a different meaning for the winners and losers. An example of such opposite approach/perspective is the result of the First Gulf War: the declaration of success by the American side /.../ with reclaiming Kuwait. For Saddam Hussein the measure of his success was regaining his power. Audrey Kurth Cronin in her work, *How Terrorism Ends. Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2009, presents the historical experience of fighting the movements that derive from terrorism as the method of warfare and recalls the victorious strategies: eliminating the leaders, including some of them to the political process, supporting the internal breakdown of a system, forced elimination of the whole movement, support for the transformation into a different, less radical form of violence. She also understands, that the effective victory theory in war on terror must be based on raising social awareness, isolating the terrorists and creating an alternative identity that will condemn the crimes and deprive the fanatics of the martyrdom splendor.

power of instruments shaping public opinion (worldwide 24/7 news media) is not to be underestimated. In fact, we need to address three basic questions that are of equal importance for the strategy of a country at war and its government, three issues sanctioning the war goals and ensuring social acceptance for actions leading to them: What shape should the victory take? What are the means to achieve it? What is its overall cost (post-wars years included)? It is the framework within which it is important to clearly formulate the goals to be achieved with the use of armed forces, which is of basic importance for deciding on the required means and time to do it. Lacking that clarity can lead to losing public support for the government activity – an unalienable factor in democratic countries. Setting out clear war goals must also be connected with the responsibility for the state of affairs after it has ended. Every recent military conflict meant an actual long-lasting “gridlock” (financial, military, political) for the winning country. It could not go forward from the point where the conflict ended. Two major ones – in Iraq and Afghanistan did question whether the achieved final outcome of war was coherent with the originally declared goals and the expected shape of victory.

The “victory theory” wants to, within political, economical and military criteria, build the understanding of the changes brought about by the fact of victory for the winning party’s politics and international relations. The scope and method of the mobilization of the country’s resources for the realization of the primarily outlined goals, as well as the scale of the country’s obligation and responsibility after the conflict, are also subject to research. A number of researchers agree that the perspective of one generation (25 years) is required and sufficient for analyzing the phenomena connected with the consequences of a military victory. The time frame of about a quarter a century is accurate as a war shapes the psychology and emotions of the nation for at least one generation of all its citizens (those who waged, fought or survived it without active participation). That’s why the proposed time allows for credible analysis of victory viewed as the whole set of variables directly connected with the finished conflict, although not always planned or intended. An Australian scholar and proponent of this concept writes that “the victory can be only measured when the outcome of war is treated as continuum”<sup>21</sup>

21 See I. Bickerton, *The Illusion of Victory. The True Costs of War*, Melbourne 2011, Melbourne University Press, pp. 18–22. In his research the starting point is a peace treaty, a truce that ends a military conflict and then analyses to what degree and with what results

– as that changes the method of evaluating victory and failure. Every analysis of the meaning of victory must include the research results of its long term consequences. If the war result did not significantly change the *status quo* in the sphere of economy, politics and social life over a certain period of time, including the conditions imposed on the defeated and the way in which it took place, then taking into consideration the total cost of a war, we see that the victory has not been in fact reached”<sup>22</sup>. In consequence, this means that the military victory isn’t identical with reaching political goals. In this view Bickerton is close to Basil Liddel-Hart, who describes in his seminal work “Strategy” that victory – the object of war – has to lead “to a better peace – even if only from your own point of view”<sup>23</sup>.

The value of victory is measured by the durability and quality of peace. For the trend of research described above (“victory theory”) the importance of Bickerton’s work, which is rich in cross-references to other scientists’ findings, lays in the fact that he picks up the problem at the point where others have left off and are no longer interested in the outcome, the aftermath of war. Bickerton doesn’t analyse the immediate consequences of wars, but their longstanding after-effects, as seen with the eyes of both sides of conflict. The victory, as he proves it, needs to be analyzed not as something momentary and temporary, but in view of its prolonged

its conditions have been realized 25 years later. He looks at the historic period spanning from the Napoleon era till the war in Afghanistan, just like Brian Bond, quoted earlier. The tendency to assess victory in long-term perspective appears more and more often in contemporary analyses of military conflicts, see: W.L. Peace, *End Game Strategies. Winning the Peace*, US Army War College, Carlisle, July 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> B.H. Liddell-Hart, *Strategy*, Meridian, London 1991, p. 353. He concentrates not only on the quality of peace, that should be better than pre-war, but also on the better situation of the winning side. He doesn’t yet directly see the durability of peace as a point of relative balance of benefits for both sides of a finished conflict. Nevertheless, he does take a step forward in that direction, seeing that “the end must be correlated with the means”, what can make peace negotiations a better component of victory (and a permanent peace), rather than fighting till the very end. That approach can be accurate in certain situations for the conflicted sites, though today’s research questions the universality of the peace talks as a guarantor of permanent and “better” peace. Harvard University Institute for Strategic Studies Professor, Monica Duffy Toft proves that, statistically, in wars fought from 1940–2000, the negotiated peace conditions did not bring about the renewal of fighting in only 22% of cases, and only 12% of those that ended in a battlefield victory were reignited. See: *Peace Through Victory. The Durable Settlement of Civil Wars*, [www.yale.edu/macmillan/ocvprogram/papers/OCV](http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/ocvprogram/papers/OCV) – January 2013.

limitations and determinants. An absolute victory is in fact only abstract, its price is likely to increase as the time goes by, both for the winners and losers. And war is always a risky business where one rarely arrives at its original goals.

## The classics of *victory theory*

Two American scholars and their work are certainly to be credited for the shape of modern *victory theory* – Robert Mandel<sup>24</sup> and William C. Martel<sup>25</sup>. Their publications provide in-depth, extensive analysis of the problem of military victory, in the most practical and politically useful way<sup>26</sup>. According to Mandel, victory is subjective, its evaluation is based on subjective opinions and assessments, which are much more often based on political rather than military criteria. He suggests that we forget the traditional dichotomy: victory vs. failure and perceive that process in two separate categories of military and strategic victory. The latter being related to the period of peace and comprising the realization of short, medium and long-term national objectives, regional and global causes of waging a war. The first one, according to the Clausewitzian school of thought, is nothing more than defeating the opponent in combat, crushing its forces, reducing its ability to continue current military operation and prevent against new threats. Strategic victory for Mandel means reaching the state of control over the losing nation, which will allow for the transformation process – of its both political and economic systems so that they can function legitimately in international environment, as in the case of Germany after World War II. What is important, in

<sup>24</sup> R. Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder 2006., id., *Reassessing Victory in Warfare, Armed Forces and Society*, no 4, July 2007, pp. 461–495., *Defining Postwar Victory*, in: J. Angstrom, I. Duyvesteyn, *Understanding Victory and Defeat in Contemporary War*, Routledge, London 2007, pp. 13–46.

<sup>25</sup> W.C. Martel, *Victory In War. Foundations of Modern Military Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, op.cit., *Victory In War. Foundations of Modern Strategy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Martel found himself during a recent election campaign in the USA within a wide circle of foreign affairs advisors to the Republican presidential candidate. His interest in the application level of his study is therefore unquestionable.

strategic victory? We assume that succeeding in both phases of the whole process is the answer<sup>27</sup>.

In his research Mandel analyses modern strategic victories, based on the observation of the activity of western democracies after the Cold War. He confronts these findings with the “pre-modern” understanding of victory, i.e. destroying the enemy with all one’s force, occupying of its territory and resources, establishing new authorities, whose decisions will always be in line with the winner’s policy, not minding economic or social issues. His *theory of strategic victory* following the battlefield one, is a six-layer construction<sup>28</sup>, preventing the escalation of post-war hostilities, political disorder, and compromising the international politics of the winner.

Strategic victory criteria according to Robert Mandel	
Information control	Analysis of the potential sources of post-war destabilization, prospect of relaunching military action by the opponent, sustaining one’s own information systems, manipulating or destroying the opponents’ systems.
Military deterrence	Military deterrence and safeguarding of the defeated country against potential internal and external aggressors with the threat of imminent, unavoidable punishment.
Political stability	Providing the defeated nation with a legitimate government and administration, whose members are chosen from among its citizens and will cooperate with the winning side.
Economic revival	Ensuring access to the strategic resources and the reintegration of the losing country with regional and international economic system.
Social justice	Social order control in the defeated country. Progressive transition towards solving internal conflicts in a peaceful way using local judicial system.
Diplomatic legitimacy	Recognition and approval of the winner’s policy on all levels – by its citizens, allies and international organizations.

Based on: R. Mandel, *The Meaning of Military Victory...*

<sup>27</sup> Military victory, in Mandel, for it to create conditions for strategic victory, must meet the following four criteria: effective win over an enemy at the lowest possible level of incurred losses, reduction of the possible future capabilities of the losing side to fight an offensive war, creating conditions for its effective self-defense, minimizing the damage to local infrastructure and number of civilian casualties: see: R. Mandel, *The Meaning /.../*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>28</sup> W.C. Martel, *Victory In War. Foundations of Modern Military Policy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 17–29.

According to these theoretical guidelines, the author's conclusion is somewhat pessimistic, as the impediments on the way to strategic victory defined in this way make it almost impossible to find at least one recent example that could be called a textbook one<sup>29</sup>. Mandel points out that the victories like the ones described above are extremely rare, as most wars have limited objectives and hardly ever the reconstruction of the defeated system is one of them. Additionally, today's wars are often fought against non-state actors, where the ultimate win is hard to reach and so is ensuring conditions for "winning peace". He also describes a specific paradox which shows the collision of expectations and reality. If the strategic victory is so rare, then why expect that it can actually take place? In that view Mandel analyses modern conflicts – the Gulf War, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. In each of these cases the victories didn't, in his opinion, lead to strategic victories, mainly because the winner overestimated its post-war benefits, had set out unclear objectives and underestimated the sources of permanent resistance among the defeated. Based on these observations he came to a conclusion that although strategic victory is more ephemeral and more difficult to reach than the battlefield one, it is still possible and attainable.

As for application level, Mandel's reflection is built the way most American studies are – their authors focus on the international role and national interest of the USA. He thinks, that in the future America should limit its participation in wars only to those absolutely necessary for securing the country's vital interests, where the chances, scale and significance of the benefits will justify the efforts. He calls upon the politicians to recognize the integrity between the methods wars are fought, and the way the post-war situation is managed. Careful, yet clear formulation of the war objectives, precise selection of the forces required for obtaining that goal and building credible exit strategies are also crucial. At preparation level, recognizing the vagueness of the strategic victory, Mandel suggests we construct political-military strategies and designate appropriate means to develop instruments necessary for "winning peace". The chances for reaching strategic victory increase when we focus more closely on *human intensive strategies* and not those based on technological superiority. This will guarantee future, gradual adjustment of

29 Ibid. pp. 27–29. An interesting example of using this 6-point model of victory is presented in chapter 4, where the author presents the pitfalls of decisive process, based on unrealistic, difficult to match, demanding assumptions, plans and calculations.

the victorious side of conflict to the post-war reality, its focus on preventing destabilization and escalation of violence, as well as promote civil society in the defeated country.

The purpose of Martel's research, a professor of international relations at Tufts University in Massachusetts, is not specific in defining victory, but searching for useful analytical tools and instruments, a set of clear guidelines, according to which the variables and their influence on the outcome of research can be measured. Martel's assumption is that the way we reflect on victory has to be dynamic in nature. New methods of using power in order to gain political goals, during peace-keeping, and stabilization missions, promotion of democracy, military prevention actions and so on, force us to take a new look at the issue. The term in itself is ambiguous for him, too. Its wording has caused a lot of problems in proper and effective use of the armed forces and good rapport with public opinion. The value of his work for academics is in precise description of the subject matter, and enabling other scholars to analyze the problem in changing situational contexts, and with critical review of the subject matter literature. But his deliberations start with a broad and admirable review of the problem of victory in military and strategy historiography, starting from Sun-Tzu and ancient Greece and arriving at the Cold War strategists<sup>30</sup>. This compilation is regarded highly not only due to its vast, far-reaching scope of observation, but also because of outlining the shape of critical analysis of the issue throughout history. But the question whether it is possible to indicate the common intellectual roots of the "victory theory" by analyzing the works of world leaders and historians from various periods still remains. That historical introduction is followed by the actual theoretical investigation to the problem. He applies coherent, concise and innovative way for analyzing some constant elements of strategy, i.e. goals, means and methods, without unnecessary integration and generalization. Martel introduces four specific categories in which to measure victory:

The first one relates to the analysis level. Martel distinguishes between tactical, political-military and strategy level. However, he isn't concerned with strict military categories connected with military activity – tactics, operations, and strategy, but

**30** W.C. Martel, *Victory In War. Foundations of Modern Military Policy [...]*, pp. 15–82. See also interesting chapter on the "American theory of victory", pp. 104–148.

with the scale and the outcome of victory. The tactical layer, according to Martel, integrates the military layer of tactics with operations, i.e. the effects of individual battles and campaigns. The political-military, corresponds to the overall strategy and will be closer to reaching by one side of the conflict partial or complete goals. The level of victory from the category of *overall* strategy does not relate to the *grand strategy*, that is integration of all available country's resources in order to obtain the objectives on the national level. According to Martel, that is equal to a decisive victory, bringing about significant changes in the international system. The value of that scheme does not only lie in giving new meanings to old terms, but in showing varied scale of possible effects of victory.

The second criterion for assessing victory proposed by Martel is the scale of the change in the *status quo* implemented by the winner. It can be, for example, limited and bring about the change in the opponents' behavior (as in 1986 United States air strikes against Libya), or widespread and lead to the elimination of the enemy regime (the outcome of war in Iraq in 2003).

The third criterion is connected to the costs of war, the scale of engagement and deployment of the country's political, economic and social resources that are required during a war. That mobilization can be restricted, but also broad and far-reaching.

The last one has to do with the scale of post-war commitments and obligations imposed on the victorious nation (economic help, political support), and these can also be both limited or far-reaching and long-lasting.

What may seem problematic is the way Martel relates to the definition guidelines for grand strategic victory, but also his inconsistent application of the proposed criteria. In his opinion it is both the deep change in international relations (system), similar to the outcome of a war between hegemons, but also the change in balance of power on regional level, and finally – “the outcomes of wars in which the state defeats the economic, political and military sources of power of another state, that prevents it from using military power or posing a threat, and intends that those changes will have strategic consequences”<sup>31</sup>. From this perspective the vast majority of all resolved military conflicts can fall into this category, can fit

31 W.C. Martel, *Victory In War. Foundations of Modern Military Policy /.../*, p. 98.

those definition criteria and it does not have to bring about significant changes in international order<sup>32</sup>. The defeated country would have to be a superpower for that scale of change to come to existence.

Just like in the case of Robert Mandel’s work, Martel also refers his analysis to the US foreign and security policy. Based on case studies and the analysis of the variety of conflicts ranging from American Revolutionary War, War of 1812, both World Wars, Korean and Vietnam Wars, he builds the “American victory theory”. It is based on the model of the American success during World War II. Martel takes that model further in the analysis of 1986 US bombing of Libya, invasion of Panama in 1989, the Gulf War, conflicts in the Balkans in 1990s, 2001 war in Afghanistan and in Iraq two years later. What can be interesting, is that Martel’s criteria are in many ways related/close to those suggested by Mandel. Especially in the context of post-war reconstruction time and reintegration of the defeated country with the international system.

American „victory theory” according to W.C. Martel <sup>1</sup>
Military victory over the enemy and disintegration of its resources
Gaining control over the defeated state’s territory
Launching political and administrative reforms in the defeated country
Reconstruction of its economy and infrastructure
Changes in foreign policy of the losing country with regard to benefits of the winner
Setting up new strategic relations with the previous opponent

<sup>1</sup> W.C. Martel, *Victory In War. Foundations of Modern Military Policy /.../*, pp. 136–148.

Based on: W.C. Martel, *Victory In War. Foundations of Modern Military Policy...*

**32** The influence of victory on international order from the Congress of Vienna to the post Cold War era is analyzed by G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory. Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2001. The point of reference is the method of ensuring post-war stabilization, its cost and durability. His remarks are focused on three issues: the logics behind the choice of behavior after a victorious war, the reasons why they prefer institutionalized or legitimate solutions for establishing a stable international order and the sources of long-lasting international order after WW II (despite the changes that take place within it).

## The *victory theory* – an outline

“The victory theory” *in statu nascendi*, is in fact an academic reflection (with certain pretenses to possible application in practical politics). Still, it is hard to try to find it in academic handbooks and any reader-friendly studies. That is why it is of vital importance to pay special attention to the one and only such attempt (that I have been able to find in the course of my research). Commissioned by the US Armed Forces, it was prepared by the US War Army College Professor – John Boone Bartholomees.<sup>33</sup> He argues victory theory to be the biggest theoretical challenge security experts are confronted with. His study points to an inadequate understanding of the problem of military victory, insufficient terminology, but also, in broader aspect, intellectual framework for creating a consistent concept. Therefore by introducing some order into this area of academic research, he views his essay as a contribution to the general discussion rather than an exhaustive description of the issue. Thus, the biggest value of Bartholomees’s work lies in its generalizations and critical, systematic and synthetic review of prior, other scholars’ findings in the field of military victory. Following that trail, we could attempt to point out the main directions of the relevant research:

**First, subjectivity of perception.** In scholarly literature it is often noted that a war victory is more of a *post-factum* evaluation, an estimation of the situation, rather than a fact resulting from completing a certain condition. The perception is based and focused on the outcome of war (evaluated in separation from the actual moment of termination of conflict), and not the effort (measured in death toll, missile yield, the extent of destruction on the side of the opponent). This prevents us from generating an objective understanding of the phenomena, as it introduces the variables that depend on the conditions and the point of view of the observer. The majority of scholars used to put a parallel line between victory and the goals that had been put forward at the onset of the war. But these can be subject to change, during an ongoing conflict, as the surrounding conditions where the conflict takes place change, too. The “theory of victory” cannot therefore be, by definition, a solid, and never changing reflection. It needs to demand from the

33 J. Boone Bartholomees, *A Theory of Victory*, in: *ibid* (ed.), “US Army War College Guide to National Security Issues”, vol. 1, pp. 79–94, Washington DC 2008.

politicians and the military precision and clarity of the declared goals and adequate response to the society's expectations. This last factor is of crucial importance in democratic countries, where public approval and support is indispensable for politically legitimate actions. Raymond Aron was among the first to notice in his reflections on war and peace dialectics, that the ultimate victory does not necessarily belong to the one who dictates the peace conditions<sup>34</sup>. Brian Bond points very accurately to the ambiguity of victories, however spectacular they seem at first. In fact, a military victory, or some remarkable success, some gain, are not required or sufficient to recognize the victory as ultimate. Not required, as the victory can be declared independently from the net losses, and not sufficient, as even evident gains do not guarantee final success. The fact that one side wins a great victory over another does not imply that the losing side sustains a total defeat. A good reflection of that problem can be found in opposing narratives formulated in France in Germany after the end of World War I.

**Second – a cost-benefit ratio in assessing victory.** In general understanding, the victory should be “worthy” of the incurred costs, casualties and efforts. In this rational approach there is still hidden one significant dilemma that boils down to the question whether in specific conditions it is better and more rewarding to go on fighting, or to cease the hostilities. Putting an end to a war can be a better solution than continuing it or prolonging a stalemate situation – although it does not have to mean victory. Lack of failure is of course better than experiencing it and the lack of victory better than a Pyrrhic victory. But it is clear that a war is not going to finish until conflicted sides don't admit that peace is a better choice than going on fighting. According to the military theory scholars and strategists, if the cost of war exceeds the value of prospected political goals, it is advisable to give up fighting. In traditional studies, the victory is measured by whether the victorious side experiences any improvements / is better off compared to the situation from before the war. Currently it is accepted to agree on the increased responsibility of the winner for the situation of the loser and the shape of international relations resulting from the post-war balance of force.

<sup>34</sup> See: R. Aron, *Peace and War. A Theory of International Relations*, Praeger Publishers, New York 1970, pp. 150–173.

**Third – the time factor in victory evaluation.** Our most natural, conventional associations with war are based on instinct, history and mass media. This remains true regardless from the fact that along with the civilization progress, changes in international law, media, and humanitarian ideals the way wars have been fought have changed, as well as the perception of failure and success. This situation creates the clash between our expectations and reality, which is followed by serious consequences – the wars do not often bring clear, evident solutions, or at least a logical understanding of the position fighting countries have found themselves in. If then war is in fact a multilayered phenomenon, so has to be a victory. A criterion that puts limitation on the judgment subjective value is the length or the period of time which has elapsed from the actual military victory until the process of evaluation its influence on post-war aftermath and its positive side effects.

**Fourth – victory as a political phenomenon.** The reflection of that idea is found in the perception of victory as a political act. It is implied that a military victory, without any clearly visible political gains, deforms the comprehension of it. This deformation could result in potentially wrong political decisions. Liddel-Hart reminds that what has been won in battlefield does not have to be necessarily transformed into a better and safer world. Napoleon victories did not change social systems of the nations defeated in those wars (Prussia, Austria, Russia). After World War I – military victory did not develop into strategic reconstruction, due to abandoning the transformation process of Germany (which in fact did happen after the next world war). That is why military victories do not determine the result of war *per se*. They present their winners with opportunities – but when constrained by current conditions, they remain beyond their control.

**Fifth – the negligence of the time when the peace conditions are set up in research does not help in understanding the meaning of strategic victory.** The analysis of modern wars leads the scholars to a reflection that they are becoming a less and less profitable political tool. The statistics of military conflicts after 1945 shows that over half of them, just after they had ended, were followed by new waves of violence and decreased regional stability. The researchers seem to generally agree that strategic victory can be reached when in the post-conflict phase the winning country is able to set the foundations for political stability allowing for cooperation after the war is ended. Apart from that there have to exist ways and

methods to help solving problems generated by post-war chaos, such as possible violence resulting from ethnical or national differences / clashes. The winner has to be able to control the sources of information that can be potentially dangerous in building post-war stability and to hold onto both the international and internal mandate for action. They also participate in overall efforts leading to rebuilding the broken country, which is a warrant for its security. All this put together does not lead the victory theory researchers to postulate full effectiveness of all of the above issues. Nonetheless the aim is to assure synergy of success in all of the actions leading to and included in the definition of the term – strategic victory.

**Sixth – victory and failure, clearly two opposite ends are equally unclear.**

There are many levels of success, many points of reference lower from what we could call victory, yet to some extent reaching certain political goals of war. The academics suggest a 7-point grading scale of victory, where both positive and negative components are arranged in the following order: DEFEAT – FAILURE – NO VICTORY – NO SOLUTION – NO FAILURE – SUCCESS – VICTORY. On that scale the (strategic) victory will stand for complete realization of the war objectives, providing solution to all of the problems connected with the victorious war, and a defeat will mean a catastrophe. The rest of the scale levels combine the elements of success and failure. Success, possible without complete realization of goals, is not synonymous with victory. It isn't of course the only, and very strict, too, division put forward by the theoreticians. Some researchers go even further in classification of victory – by offering separate types of grading scales for measuring various levels of war achievement<sup>35</sup>.

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The “victory theory” rejects simple zero-sum constructs concerning war, peace and victory. For today's analysts the *victory* results from the evaluation of the effects of war and their reinforcement over the period of time on the level of tactics and operations, strategy and the grand strategy. On the first level, victory is a military assessment, based on rational criteria. On the strategic level and the grand strategy level it consists of a greater number of factors, and *vox populi* will decide on the winners and losers. The victory must also be acknowledged by the

35 Bartholomees gives the detailed scaling of the victory measurement, i.e. the assessment of: the results... See: *Theory of Victory /.../*, pp. 82–83.

defeated side and be a constant in time. That is why a strategic win is equal to the positive evaluation of the post-war situation, when the political sources of the war are fully resolved. Contemporary understanding of victory emphasizes reconstruction, reconciliation, modernization of the losing countries and societies as instruments of long-term stability. That approach does not obviously secure better protection of human life (crime and wrongdoing of Saddam Hussein' era confronted with "human" cost of the occupation of Iraq). However, it does create the acceptable frames in which the researchers try to place *just* wars (according to modern terminology: *the responsibility to protect*) and include them into modern political instruments.