

Issue Brief

September 2026
No: 545

Contextualizing Victory:
Non-Contact Warfare

Lt Gen RC Srikanth
AVSM, VSM (Retd)



Contextualizing Victory: Non-Contact Warfare

Abstract

Victory is the most desired outcome in any military conflict. With the ambit of conflict expanding beyond states, the need to modulate expectations of Victory requires to be articulated. This article examines the aspect of victory in the revised geo-strategic environment prevailing around the globe. It also could be a guideline for strategic planner to temper their expectations while laying parameters for victory, notion of victory or narrative in the asymmetric and disruptive geo-strategic environment. As nature and character of war evolves over time, it is critical for the states to define the 'limits of victory' prior to joining the visible kinetic conflicts to better manage the outcomes rather than inventing 'Notion of Victory' as an afterthought.

Keywords: Victory, Notion of Victory, Limits of Victory

Introduction

In a military contest between two nations, ideal outcome may lead to one of the nation's ending up as the 'victor' and other the 'vanquished'. This indeed is the usual and normal understanding of the term 'Victory' in military context. War has been universally accepted as an extension of politics by other means: the political object in war always remains supreme and politics intercedes prior to, during and after the conduct of war. In an 'Absolute War' as understood by Clausewitz — the culmination of War should translate to 'Absolute Victory' to the side that won and 'Total Submission' of the side that lost. Thus, 'absolute victory' should imply political, territorial, cultural, economic, social, perceptual and psychological subjugation of the vanquished state, government, army and people with the 'victorious state' with or without any latent animosity against the victorious side.

Absolute Victory

The ideal illustration encapsulated above is unlikely to be ever realized in any ideal sense, as with the conclusion of every war, the seeds of next war are invariably sown as strong undercurrents ethnicity, nationalism, vengeance, culture, religion can never be conquered. These specific attributes require to be assimilated post victory over generations with 'voluntarism' being the key. Thus, an absolute victory may remain a mirage in modern times and can never be assured

off nor should it be reasonably aspired for. The nearest example of absolute victory may take us back to the Second World War, wherein the total submission of Germany, Italy and Japan was achieved by the Allies leading to total reorientation of the world politics or Pakistan's surrender in the 1971 operations or Armenian surrender to Azerbaijan.

In keeping with the above, an ideal conception of victory could encompass the following: -

- Peace for 'Victorious' state on the requisites it desires or aspires for a sustained period of time, as Mao, post 1962 China's victory over India, believed to have said that the 'victory' would ensure at least a decade of stability along the India – China border (Zhefeng, H. 1999).
- Elimination of causes of any future conflict or disagreements that may lead to conflict or uprising.
- Willing acquiescence of the vanquished with victor and psychological amalgamation of the defeated with the victor.

Implications of Victory: Conventional Wars between States

Conventional Wars have been fought for multitude of reasons — territorial, political, ideological, religious and / or economic. But under no circumstance they should be seen as distinct and independent of each other; in fact much of the purpose for resorting to war has been a stimulating blend of these causes with one of the principals assuming the central character in precipitating a crisis. The victory in such a war should be understood as having been successful in achieving the 'Principal' or 'defending the principal'. In the Battle of Jena Auerstadt, Napoleon comprehensively defeated the Prussian Army that resulted in Prussia reducing to half its former size (Britannica, 1806), achieved an alliance with Russia and further permitted Napoleon to turn his energies towards Britain and Sweden. Though, successful in the campaign, it failed to give Napoleon an absolute victory against his adversaries who allied together to defeat him in later campaigns.

A similar analogy could also be drawn from the India – Pakistan War of 1971, which led to the creation of Bangladesh. Despite a decisive political and military victory, the foundations for the next war were not eliminated; on the contrary the need for retribution against India has become even more entrenched in the psyche of the Pakistani. In her book *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War*, C Christine Fair, subscribes to the view that “no amount of concessions given by India to Pakistan would abate the psyche of

Pakistani to give up enmity with India”. Similarly, in the India-China construct, despite the overwhelming victory in 1962 War, China failed to ‘create’ permanent peace along the borders and fostered the necessity for India to psychologically ‘stand up to’ China. Therefore, if war is a continuation of politics by other means —the culmination of war (military victory) should accommodate the prime reason for which war was fought— which is peace - paradoxical, but despite the most well-intentioned attempts — no war has ever led to sustained peace, equilibrium, yes - but peace - no. Therefore, the implications for victory in conventional war are more nuanced and could be understood as under: -

- Victory may need to be achieved by ‘defeating’ the Military, ‘coercing’ the political leadership, and ‘convincing’ the adversary and own populace in that sequence and all this to be achieved within a limited period of time.
- More than the actual fact of ‘Victory’ the ‘Notion of Victory’ may assume greater importance. The concept of this ‘notion’ would have to be imaginatively sold to nation, adversary, stakeholders and the international community.
- Displayable tangible political or physical gain should support as visible proof of victory and may augment the scaffold of ‘Notion of Victory’. The boundaries of ‘Victory’ may be circumscribed owing to the limits imposed by strategic compulsions. Such compulsions may serve to dent the quantum of claimed victory and hence would require to be communicated to the populace through an imaginative information outreach especially in contemporary artificial infused social media environment. It is these characteristics that allowed Saddam Hussein to claim victory after the First Gulf War, despite suffering massive tactical and operational military defeat. The war was thus a strategic win for him, at least in his eyes and from his perspective. The Russian Special Military Operations against Ukraine or Operation Sindoor or Operation Vijay each fall into these categories.
- The demonstrable proof of victory should provide a psychological rampart against democratic skepticism.
- A model of incremental or creeping ‘victory’ would need to be imagined that would provide requisite focus to military campaigns while at the same time generate the appropriate narrative.
- Victory is unlikely to translate into permanent Peace as sizeable quantum of military and political capital will survive with the adversary despite the military campaign.

Victory in Sub-Conventional Conflicts

Sub-conventional wars have two distinct components— internal (within the territory of the state) and external (trans-national or Proxy state sponsored). These tend to lie in the Grey Zone wherein Victory definition is amorphous and remains outside the time constraint. Ideologically driven the sub-conventional conflict persist over generations with military dominance providing a ‘veneer’ of stability through time interregnum providing political opportunities to generate condition of permanent ‘Victory’ but never removing the latent cause from the psychological firmament owing the festering wounds of military campaigns in such environments. The elimination of Naxal violence in the so called ‘Red Corridor’, across multiple states in Indian heartland, containing the terrorism in Punjab or defeating Proxy War in Jammu and Kashmir points to the notion of victory.

Victory in sub-conventional domain is envisioned by convincing the populace, creating the security environment and nullifying the impact of external constituent. The conditions of ‘Victory’ in sub- conventional wars can thus be more clearly elucidated, though they cannot be projected as lucidly. Unlike conventional warfare, the post ‘Victory’ environment can be modulated by the state to prevent relapse of the causes for the ‘populace’ to regress back into conflict.

Therefore, the degree of control and dominance which can be developed within the boundaries of the states makes creating conditions of ‘Victory’ more definitive and long lasting by adopting administrative / political measures that lies within the remit of the state.

Victory and Non-Contact Warfare

Non-Contact Warfare conceptually attempts to prompt, coerce, subordinate or subjugate the opponent(s)/adversary(s) into compliance / submission without physical contact or with minimal physical combat’. Therefore ‘Victory’ in non-contact warfare does not necessarily entail ‘defeating the military’ and concerns with ‘coercing the leadership’ and ‘convincing the populace’. It exploits the inherent inclination amongst the leadership of states for ‘avoiding military conflict’, ‘inevitability of military defeat against a strong adversary’, ‘fear of failure’, ‘political survival’ and finally ‘providing a reasonable, rational and saleable alternative’ that facilitates an ‘apparently equitable outcome’ amongst the belligerents. ‘Victory’ in the non-contact domain may have following attributes: -

- The prospects of lasting peace may be apparently more distinct in case of non-

contact warfare than conventional warfare as the outcomes is explained to the populace by their own leadership and the political cost of perceived concessions are ‘totally attributable’ to the leadership of the ‘subjugated state’. Non-contact warfare when executed through unmanned manifestations furthers this understanding.

- No limits on the extent of ‘Victory’ needs to be laid down; the degree of intimidation/coercion/compellence that can be brought to bear upon the adversary state will dictate the scale of victory and hence victory can be achieved without actually the vanquished being morally defeated or ends of the victors can be achieved without inflicting mortal pain on the adversary.
- The concept of ‘incremental victory’ that can be imperceptible and accumulated over a period of time could be adopted, rather than a ‘sledgehammer approach’ to achieving political objectives at the cost subsequent retribution. The ‘salami-slicing’ approach to PLA along the LAC and in maritime domain illustrates this notion of achieving national interests without deleterious second or multi-order effects.
- ‘Victory’ in non-contact domain is unlikely to be announced but will be felt amongst the nation states or it implies subjugation by other means and will redefine the nature of mutual and multi-lateral engagements. The nature of victory facilitates easy assimilation or new normal in the target populace or country. Imaginative population control measures and information narratives will further augment this assimilation.
- In case the kinetic and non-kinetic capability are employed in conjunct to achieve specified objectives, then escalation control is better modulated and ‘Victory’ tends to be suitably nuanced. The management of transition (exit options) post kinetic application of resources requires ingenuity and imagination.

Conclusion

The asymmetric and disruptive geo-strategic environment, now prevailing around the globe, has necessitated the imperative of revisiting the most basic concept of kinetic engagement amongst states, non-states i.e. ‘Victory’. As nature and character of war evolving over time, it is critical for the states to define the ‘limits of victory’ prior to joining the visible kinetic conflicts to better manage the outcomes rather than inventing

‘Notion of Victory’ as an afterthought.

Works Cited

Zhefeng, H. (1999). Mao and the Sino-Indian Counter attack in Self Defence. *Bai Nian Chao* (百年潮, *Century Tide*) ... He famously stated that a well-fought war would "guarantee at least thirty years of peace" with India.

Battle of Jena (1806, October 14). *Britannica*.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/302522/Battle-of-Jena>.



About the Author

Lieutenant General Rajagopala Chellamani Srikanth, AVSM, VSM (Retd), was commissioned into the Army Air Defence Regiment in March 1988. He is an alumnus of the Officer Training Academy, Defence Service Staff College, Army War College and National Defence College and has held varied Command, Instructional and Staff appointments. He has also been an Instructor/ DS at multiple Cat 'A' establishments, to include ADGM School (Now AADC), the Indian Military Academy, Senior Command Wing, the Army War College and the Indian Military Training Team, Uganda. He is also former Chief of Staff, HQ Eastern Command and Commandant, Army Air Defence College, Gopalpur. Post superannuation, he has been appointed as Professor of Eminence with the National Institute of Science and Technology, Brahmaur, Odisha and is currently pursuing his PhD in 'Non-Contact Warfare' from Allahabad University.



All Rights Reserved 2026, Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS)

No part of this publication may be reproduced, copied, archived, retained or transmitted through print, speech or electronic media without prior written approval from CLAWS. The views expressed and suggestions made in the article are solely of the author in his personal capacity and do not have any official endorsement. Attributability of the contents lies purely with author.