



# THE CONCEPT OF VICTORY IN THE 21ST CENTURY WARS

An approach to the concept of "hybrid" in modern wars

In this article, we analyze whether the concept of military victory in this 21<sup>st</sup> century can be considered a current idea, by defining the aspects of current wars. It aims at the need to limit the expectations as to achieving the goals set exclusively by the political power by means of military resources and encourages a multidisciplinary approach to address the complex dynamics that war presented during the first decades of this century.

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By **Guillermo Horacio Lafferriere**

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Translated by Mariana Rios Hudson

## INTRODUCTION

Victory was not a wrong concept for the Duke of Wellington when during the afternoon of June 18, 1815, near a place in Belgium known as Waterloo, he saw Prussian troops appearing to the left of his device; and when the Old Guard of Napoleon gave in some land, he ordered all his army to move towards the French army which, in his view, was breaking up in light of the merciless action that allied troops exercised over them.

This victory was both tactic and strategic. The first because, undoubtedly, troops of the "Monster of Europe"

were not even in conditions to withdraw in order to try a new battle. And it was strategic because the result of the battle put an end to the restoration dream of Napoleon as master of Europe<sup>1</sup>.

This example, given by Military History, is one that we think can be found at the moment when the "Kaiser Offense" failed in 1918 allowing the allies to defeat the German Empire and to put an end to the First World War or, some decades

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1. Keegan, John; *The face of battle*; Penguins Books; New York; United States of America; 1978.

later, when the Soviet Army took contact, in 1945, with the allies on the Elba River definitely closing the crazy dream of a “thousand-year Reich”.

However, after 1945, there were very few occasions in which we can find military victories that have meant the end of a battle.

Rather, in our opinion, many times, victories in the field of battle have allowed to sustain a strategic situation. This is the case of the several victories of Israel against the different Arab states which allowed to preserve the State of Israel. However, they have not been able to reach the peace that helps them get rid of the need to have a high enlistment level of its military instrument to preserve the existence of Israel.

Or, rather, victories in the tactic field that do not have an impact on the strategic one and, therefore, as we have mentioned, they cannot change the political situation that led to war<sup>2</sup>.

This appears clearly in the allied withdrawal from Iraq after almost a decade of military actions and changing political purposes for that intervention. The following withdrawal from Afghanistan, in 2014, in which, in spite of a fluctuating military effort which was massive during the last years, we can foresee that once allies have withdrawn, Talibans, who by action or omission and who made it possible for Al-Qaeda to have a sanctuary from which they could threaten and attack the West, would certainly be a menacing power factor in this country<sup>3</sup>.

We believe it is necessary, in light of this situation, to rethink the idea that military professionals have of victory and that have a direct impact over political power as well, because both stages interact at the moment of deciding to reach goals of high political importance through the use of the military resources.

#### WHAT IS BEHIND THE INCAPACITY TO GET A STRATEGIC MILITARY VICTORY?

We consider there have been some changes in the environment in which war develops, which poses the question of this part of the article.

With the appearance of what we call asymmetric war and with the decolonization process known as uprising, the paradigm upon which wars were developing changed significantly<sup>4</sup>.

Until this situation, war was an activity that military forces carried out in a greater or smaller quality, confronting in spaces and times in which, in its interaction, sought to

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cause enough damage to the enemy so that they could impose their own will.

This process could take more or less time, depending on the skills of each of the sides that are confronted but, in general, it led to the victory of one of them or, as in the case of the Korea War, to a ceasefire that has extended with different characteristics up to these days.

This is no longer the prevalent situation and it has been replaced with an operational environment that is more difficult to define and that, in the Anglo-Saxon world, is known as hybrid environment.

#### DESCRIPTION OF "HYBRID" CHARACTERISTICS

##### > Sides in struggle

These can be, at an initial stage, what we traditionally know as regular forces and, over time, one of them may become an irregular force as they see that they cannot fight the battle by means of a classic battle.

The clearest example is Iraq in 2003 when allied troops invaded the country and, after the defeat of Iraqi forces, a quasi-multinational insurgence took arms and started a battle against allied troops for almost a decade and it is, today, the one that acts against the Iraqi government after the allied withdrew from the country in mass.

There might also be the case that a regular force confronts with an insurgent force from the beginning and which eventually becomes a force of regular characteristics as it acquires skills trying to act as the latter does.

The Libyan case and, in particular, the current case of Syria seem to adapt to the description.

However, the change mentioned does not generally make these irregular forces which turned into regular to leave some of the “vices” that irregular forces normally have.

Thus, actions that do not depend on regular orders, elimination of prisoners and encouragement of terrorist actions still have an important presence in actions under development.

2. Van Creveld, Martin; *The transformation of war*; Free Press; New York; United States of America; 1991.

3. Rashid, Ahmed; *Pakistan on the brink*; Penguins Books; New York; United States of America; 2012.

4. Lafferriere, Guillermo H.E.; “La batalla asimétrica del Siglo XXI”; *Revista Ejército*; Nro. 730, Madrid, Spain; 2001.

This clearly shows the difficulties posed by the creation of any regular force, that is, one with a discipline level that the exercise of violence, hard as it might be, will always be supported by commands clearly established, so the traceability criteria may be applied to any of the actions carried out. This is difficult to find in irregular troops and in those that change to become regular ones, at least for long periods of time<sup>5</sup>.

### › Ubiquitous media

In the work “Relaciones prensa- FF.AA. en ocasión de desarrollarse operaciones militares”<sup>6</sup>, the difficult relation between troops in operations and the media in any conflict is broadly dealt with.

Possibilities that technology has provided with to the media and the economic power of great chains give them the chance to be in any place on the battlefield. And, although higher commands can, and in fact, do, establish restrictive measures to the presence of the media, their own troops, making use of their personal media and, in some cases, of the media they are provided with, have the capacity to release information at any time in social networks.

This capacity may cause that facts, which in the past were dealt with almost exclusively by military men can today be known immediately by someone who is a thousand kilometers away from the place of the action and spread “like a virus” on the Internet.

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Thus, actions that could before be considered as mistakes of an action in times of war, have the capacity to become “atrocities”. These may be understood by the local and international public as part of a wrong conception of war direction and, therefore, have a strategic impact on its development.

There are many examples of these issues and they show, on their own, the complexity level in which war can occur.

### › Presence of local and international Non- Governmental Organizations

They will act in any place they can. Sometimes, in the

5. Townshend, Charles; *People's War*; published on The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern War; Oxford; New York; United States of America; 1997.

6. Lafferriere, Guillermo H.E.; “Relaciones prensa - FF.AA. en ocasión de desarrollarse operaciones militares”; *Revista Ejército*; Madrid, Spain; April 2000.





places where sides confront; some other times, in areas of rearguard and rest and, most of the times, in the places where civilians search for shelter.

Their control will be as difficult as the control of the media and, also, because of their action and capacity to reach the international community, they will act as a sounding board of actions that troops of either side may carry out.

Lack of consideration of this aspect, an attempt to limit them without any reason or the lack of search for modes to facilitate their action may directly lead to disaster for the command that addresses their relation with them.

### › Radical Change of the Combat Paradigm

Until the appearance of the hybrid phenomenon of war, the battlefield was divided into two different areas.

One of them was the area of combat. Here, the fight was against the enemy and the main concern was to develop operations that would cause the greatest possible damage so that they could soon impose their will.

The second area was known as communications zone. This is located in the rear of the first one, advanced straight ahead as there was progress in the area where combat took place. In this communications area, priorities were related to sustaining troops in terms of logistics in the combat area

and, to a lesser extent, to encourage the feasible improvement of living conditions of the civil population that was there.

Today, war does not clearly distinguish those areas and, in practice, it sometimes happens that there is combat in both of them. The need to help civil population is not restricted to a certain sector but it is stated in the agenda of higher commands.

Thus, there will be a commander who will not only need to plan and develop combat operations but will, at the same time, be obliged to carry out some others in order to sustain civil population, rebuild facilities for the latter and even deal with complex political situations that arise from the relations of the population with their authorities.

This, in its own, will require an effort that has not been

### Guillermo Horacio Lafferriere

Colonel. Joint Board Officer, holds a degree in Strategy and Organization. Malvinas War Veteran. Under the UNO mandate, he rendered services at UNPROFOR in 1993. He has published several articles about Military History and military topics in the country and abroad. He is the author of the book *Ensayos Militares de la Guerra del Golfo Pérsico del año 2003*. Guest researcher at the Universidad Nacional de Quilmes. He is currently the Academic Secretary of the Instituto Universitario del Ejército Argentino and Professor of the course Conflict and International Security in the university course of International Relations at Universidad Argentina John F. Kennedy.

7. Johnson, David E.; *Military capabilities for hybrid war*; Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, United States of America; 2010: "Israel's experience in "hybrid" battlefields may help to understand its complexity".



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#### › Little chance to start a decisive battle

There seems to be a trend not to exist decisive combats, as it was common during the 20th century wars.

Probably, many of the characteristics mentioned in this essay have helped one of the sides not to start the battle.

This situation will make it possible for some of these alternatives to exist:

- › One of the sides may try to force the other one to start the battle, which will hardly occur if the latter has the freedom of action that allows to avoid this situation, at least until they consider the chance to successfully carry it out.
- › For long periods of time, which in practice may be indefinite, there is a situation in which sides in conflict only affect each other and, therefore, the military situation as to who is able to impose themselves over the other one does not change.

This situation may last as much as the direction political will of each of them may sustain this effort in front of their own public opinion or, rather, the real power factors that sustain their political legitimacy.

This is complex inasmuch as in the situation described, there will be no clear parameters to show in front of the very population that there is some progress that allows to see a favorable result for the force.

#### EXPECTATIONS FROM THE MILITARY SITUATION

In light of this particular scenario, it is clear that waiting for a solution through the use of the military force may lead to failure. This does not mean that the military resource has to be ignored. Not at all.

What we think is that this must be used together with other simultaneous actions that military commanders must carry out with state civil organizations, Non- Governmental Organizations, multilateral and even private organizations<sup>8</sup>, which have purposes and skills very different from the military ones. However, they must be integrated to create together with the military resource the synergy that allows

8. These private organizations may be very different. Some of them will provide armed services of different nature, such as the emblematic Blackwater. Others may have philanthropic purposes and there are also some others that operate recognition satellites that, in real time, could cover the area where they operate, using the information obtained to support different causes, which do not always coincide with the ones of the forces in conflict.

duly measured by us, but which is under permanent analysis in other countries that have directly suffered because of the changing nature that war has acquired today<sup>7</sup>.

#### › Little or zero tolerance for own losses and rejection of collateral damage

La brutalidad de la guerra ya no es un hecho desconocido por The brutality of war is not unknown to the public, but it is easily available to anyone who desires to look into these topics in the diversity of media that the current civilization puts at the disposal of any person with access to the Internet. This, together with the change in cultural standards, has made it possible not to accept significant losses in the troops during the development of military operations.

In this way, there is a challenge for political and military leaders because, if taken to the extreme, these criteria may make it difficult to reach certain military goals.

On the other hand, it acts as a moderator of actions as it leads to less freedom to carry out operations that do not have the proper planning level for their operational development.

Likewise, it was traditionally understood that undesired losses among civilians could exist in any war; this is called collateral damage and it results from the difficulties that operations often impose on their development.

However, criteria similar to the own losses apply to this and, today, it is very difficult for any military organization to counteract the release of pictures of civil casualties or injured although from a cold military point of view, these are smaller when compared to the goal achieved.

to change the situation that led to the idea of using violence to solve it.

In this idea, there will not be an exclusive search for a successful action on the battlefield or a series of violent actions of great importance that will gradually lead to break the fighting will of the enemy, but for a favorable situation for the direction that justifies the great effort made and creates a general positive stability status for the future.

It may seem that this raises some needs only to higher commands in charge of military operations, that is, the Commander of the Theater of Operations, presented by the Executive Power with the responsibility to develop the campaign, as our doctrine states.

On the contrary, we consider that the need to create the synergy we mentioned goes through all direction levels and must be sought and articulated from the higher to the lower level.

There are no lower level decisions that have effects on their narrow area of influence, but the interaction of actors that we have listed makes it impossible for a command to avoid the responsibility the situation imposes.

But this complex, and why not, perplexing situation for the classical analysis of war has its counterpart.

It does not operate as a condition for one of the sides in conflict, but it operates in a similar way for both of them.

This acts as a “leveler of forces” because the mere fact of having a greater military capacity does not guarantee a successful situation.

A group that has reasons to justify its actions, that has the capacity to make them be understood by a great part of the international community; that simultaneously shows an articulation with actors that will be present in the conflict and that takes advantage of its relation with the civil population involved in it in a smart way will be able to reach a superior freedom of action before an adversary that cannot create this virtuous relation. This aspect will make them lose initiative (freedom of action is always the result of a zero-sum game) and will clearly be on the defensive in the strategic aspect.

The impact caused by our statements, especially in the capacity to “level- off forces” that arises from the characteristics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century wars, should, in our opinion, be an incentive for the necessary strategy to create forces of any military instrument.

Ideas such as training quality, high individual discipline, leadership capacity and the availability of lethal and non-lethal quality elements and a certain ability to quickly show force are at the front of the list of requirements to be met by any military force. This is over guidelines such as the ones that establish the idea of mass armies with unlimited resources and willing to be gradually pawned according to 19<sup>th</sup> century mobilization concepts.

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#### A VISION TO THE FUTURE

Our vast experience in Peacemaking Operations and the different scenarios in which our forces are operating have forced them to interact in a very close way to the one that will be required by any military action in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This capacity should be assessed and put into perspective with the information obtained from military commitments that have taken place and will take place with the purpose of acquiring the greatest possible experience.

We think it is essential for these experiences to be internalized when training troops trying not to make them be only skills acquired by contingents abroad. This will make the military instrument acquire certain skills for actions with concrete possibilities of reaching the effects required by the political power if used for military actions.

War is under constant change. It sometimes changes slowly causing the feeling that unchanging situations have been reached.

Some other times, it changes in a quick way leading the doctrine used by military forces to support an operation to crisis.

We are currently going through an accelerated mutation phase that has led to intense discussions about the way to fight and solve complexities presented by the phenomenon in several nations.

This hybrid characteristic will probably affect us for a long period of time requiring military forces to develop multiple skills, which are sometimes contradictory, but always challenging for the reaching of purposes set.

The lack of understanding of the environment in which war is being developed will present an important coincidence with what has normally been constant for the military forces of many nations: they preferred to get ready for the war scenario that better adapted to “their vision” of war.

This mistake is, in no few cases, paid with defeat.

Understanding war and its trends is key to any military instrument that aims at being a useful element for the country it serves.

› REFEREED ARTICLE