Making It Hard To Win: The Meaning of Victory and the Iraq War

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to illuminate the concept of victory in war with the aim of understanding why, despite a major success in the first stage of Iraq War, victory could never be claimed. Two recent books on the subject are reviewed and next, a conception of victory is laid down based on the works of Clausewitz. Victory is thus defined as "the achievement of the political objective set by either one of the belligerent states or alliance of states". This framework is then applied to the case of Iraq War in order to demonstrate how the political objective of democracy building makes victory more difficult to achieve. We point out three major complications regarding the achievement of this objective: the issue of defining democracy, the extension of war as a logical corollary and the cultural argument. Finally, two reasons   one domestic and one systemic   are presented to explain what factors led the United States to undertake the task of transforming Iraq regardless of the mentioned obstacles. The conclusion draws attention to the unique characteristics of the Iraq War.

KEY WORDS: Victory; Iraq War; Democracy building; Clausewitz

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> We accepted this war for an object – a worthy object – and the war will end when that object is attained. Under God I hope it will never end until that time.
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> (Abraham Lincoln, in: Ikle, 2005).

The Iraq war was a remarkable success. The overwhelming supremacy of United States military power was demonstrated when its troops quickly captured the capital city without much difficulty and with very low casualties, followed by the success of the seizure and rapid trial of Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein and other important figures of Iraqi politics.

The first sentence above sounds comprehensibly strange for anyone who has been following the developments of the Iraq war. To begin with, the verb tense seems inadequate after all the war is considered not to be over. Nevertheless, the rest of the paragraph sounds pretty reasonable and is actually undeniably true. Why is it so then, that the conclusion does not follow from the premises? Why, even though the United States has accomplished what seems a major military victory for any traditional warfare measure, one cannot talk about "victory"?

In the following I shall offer a definition of victory in war that both addresses the question of Iraq War and helps students and scholars to deal with the broader question of assessing victory in any given war. By victory, I do not mean victory on the battlefield, which is that the majority of studies examine, but victory as a political achievement. While the first concept is fundamentally important, it does not help us to understand why the term cannot be used in the case of the Iraq War, for example. In supporting the task of defining a manageable concept of victory in war, I will review two recent books on the subject, which seem to be in a great extend influenced by the puzzle posed by Iraq. Next, basing on the writings of Clausewitz, I will present a concise version of the concept that both intends to elucidate its basic meaning and can be applied to any historical situation. As will be indicated below, Clausewitz himself did not present a definition of victory in war, but only to battle

engagements. Subsequently, I shall apply the definition presented here to the case of Iraq War in order to indicate how adding democracy to the equation of victory makes it significantly more difficult to achieve. Finally, I address some reasons that may explain why, despite the evident difficulties, the United States ultimately decided to undertake the task of transforming Iraq.

The major objective of this article is to identify the central element of victory in war, thereby necessarily leaving out other important but not central elements of the definition. Therefore, as discussed below, the role of public perceptions, for example, may be important but it is not central. The advantage of this method is that it helps to clarify what a victory is supposed to look like, which is an especially important consideration given the current multiplicity of wars that are characteristic of our times. Parenthetically, the very fact that contemporary wars have more complex characteristics seems to be leading to the loss of meaning of the term "victory". Conversely, this article intends to avoid this loss of meaning by offering a deliberately parsimonious definition of victory that considers only one major explanatory variable and is also atemporal, i.e., that can be applied to any war in modern history; including, in the case studied here, the war in Iraq. Although the definition presented hereafter may be useful for assessing several types of conflicts, the sense I use it in this article relates only to wars understood as an open armed conflict between two or more organized political groups preceded by a declaration of war, which may be formal or informal. Thus, three elements must be highlighted regarding the notion of war as it is used in this article. First, a war must be an open armed conflict. This excludes conflicts when one belligerent does not have, cannot or is strongly constrained in using armaments, as for example, was the case of UN forces during the intervention in the Rwanda civil war in the 1990's. Second, this relatively broad definition of war considers not only states but any "organized groups" understood as a grouping of individuals responding to some sort of hierarchical organization. Hence, the United States can achieve victory in a war against Al Qaeda, which is an organized group, but it cannot achieve victory against "terrorism". Finally, the need for a declaration of war,

formal or informal, is a necessary condition in order to differentiate a war from other kinds of conflicts or interventions, such as peacebuilding efforts (which usually comes forward after an actual war that did not have victory as an outcome). The declaration need not to be formal, but the actors must recognize they are in a state of war. This definition of war is necessary not for fitting the definition of victory presented henceforth, but because only then it makes any sense using the term "victory". One can say that the UN has been successful or unsuccessful in say, Haiti or Sierra Leone, but not that the UN has achieved victory or been defeated since, according to the notion of war uses here, there wasn't an actual war opposing the United Nations against those countries.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that this article is not about the process, but about the results. In other words, a lot of variables may be important in the process leading to victory, such as public support, military tools and civil-military relations, but these variables do not define victory as such. As a matter of fact, much of the confusion surrounding the problem of defining victory is due to the fact that some authors seem to confuse the process with the etymological definition. Accordingly, it is not a concern of this article to indicate what factors may influence victory as one possible outcome of war, but merely to present some reflections in order to arrive to a satisfactory definition of the term.

2 THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING VICTORY

The literature about war offers plenty of works focusing on how it begins (ex: Midlarsky, 1975), how to avoid wars (ex: Cimbala, 1986) and on to achieve victory in war through efficient strategies (ex: Weigley, 1973; Alexander, 2002). Usually, the last sort of work, which includes in great measure the famous Clausewitz's study on war, concentrates mainly in factors relating to the battlefield, like defense versus offense, developments in weapons technology, and so forth. There are also examples of works on how to stop a war (ex: Dunnigan; Martel, 1987) and dealing with the important but often neglected

subject of war endings (ex: Albert; Luck, 1980; Goemans, 2000; Ikle, 2005). Surprisingly the vast majority of these works do not pay much attention to what victory in war actually means, and the ones who do don't give it adequate consideration. As a matter of fact, it seems that many authors take the meaning of victory in war for granted – just look at the result of the war and it must be pretty obvious who was the winner. Some writings, especially the ones dealing with war termination, give the impression of ignoring or underplaying the fact that one major possibility in war is simply a victory of one belligerent over another. Goemans, for example, suggests that in a war, each one of the sides have only two options, "continued fighting or settlement" (Goemans, 2000: 19). Therefore, much of the work on war termination concentrates on the negotiation of peace treaties which, as Carroll (1969) points out, are the most usual way of war termination. Nevertheless, a peace treaty may be either negotiated or imposed, making the expression "peace treaty" just a euphemism for victory. Since the explanation of how wars end (peace treaties, armistice, annexation, etc) must include why wars end, the question of victory is raised again for although there are several explanations for why wars end, one of them is certainly because one of the sides has achieved victory.

In one of the first relevant works about termination of wars, Carroll (1969) was faced with the problem of the meaning of victory in war. When researching the subject he must have realized that he was not the only one in this quandary, since according to his own studies he found fifteen meanings for victory. He divided these meanings into four categories: "(1) victory as interpreted in a purely military sense; (2) victory as a relationship between the belligerents; (3) victory as a relationship between war aims and war outcome; and (4) victory as interpreted in terms of gains and losses, without reference to war aims." (Carroll, 1969: 305). Latter I will argue why this four sided definition is misleading and how the definition that will be presented hereafter bring it all together into a single category, thus simplifying this matter. More recently, at least two works have dealt with the question of victory in war adding a few more meanings to Carroll's account. They are Johnson's and Tierney's Failing to win (2006)

and Robert Mandel's The meaning of military victory (2006)i. The underlying characteristic of these writings is that they seem to be deeply influenced by the Iraq War puzzle presented at the beginning of this article, and for this reason they attempt to rethink the concept of victory. As will become clear later, there is no reason for reinventing this concept, since the definition exposed hereafter can be useful to understand any particular war, including the current one in Iraq.

Johnsons and Tierney concentrate on an important aspect of war developments – the role of perceptions as influenced by "beliefs, symbolism of events, and manipulation by elites and the media" (Johnsons; Tierney, 2006: 5). The authors examine how the formation of perceptions is constructed and how war's outcomes are evaluated based on these perceptions. Therefore, the definition of victory that derives from this point of view is one that puts it in the hands of the observer, that is, it is ultimately the perceptions people have that is relevant to decide which country has prevailed in a war. Consequently, actual victories may be turned into imagined defeats and vice versa. Johnsons and Tierney distinguish three classes of biases that influence people's perception of victory: mind-sets, salient events and social pressures. Mindsets exist "before the crisis or war begins and represent all the hypotheses and theories that he [the observer] is convinced are valid at a given moment in time" (Johnsons; Tierney, 2006: 51); salient events are "particular events during a crisis or a war" (Johnsons; Tierney, 2006: 62), and social pressures relates to the influence exerted by figures like government, media and elites. The authors then utilize this framework to examine some specific events such as the Cuban missile crisis, the Yom Kippur War and, in the last part, the war in Iraq. The last case presents an evident difficulty for their study since it is an ongoing war and there is no feasible way to contrast actual outcomes and perceptions. Their solution was to present a "scorecard" measuring positive and negative war outcomes by the time the book was written and contrast it with some opinion polls, in order to conclude that there is an "evident diversity in perceptions" and that "the average perception is surprisingly similar to the scorecard result" (Johnsons; Tierney, 2006: 283).

As the war in Iraq is not over, and thus victory or defeat still is a pending matter, Johnson and Tierney's analysis for this specific case loses some of its appeal.

Indeed, there is no doubt of the importance of perceptions, especially when it comes to democracies conducting a war, since it can play a decisive role when it comes to the amount of support a leader can gather. The authors properly emphasize that since the World War II it became a more complicated matter to assess victory in war since "the wholesale conquest of rival states and populations has become a rarity (...) the relative winners and losers in the global chess game (...) are much more ambiguous, and evaluations are more open to interpretation and influence by psychological biases" (Johnsons; Tierney, 2006: 6). Moreover, as the authors indicate, perceptions of success or failure may even decide the actual outcome of a war, notwithstanding a wide gap between imagined victory or failure and reality. Nonetheless, even though perceptions are a fundamentally important matter, it is not relevant for our purpose here, which is to come up with an objective definition of genuine victory in war, in contrast with the subjective notion offered by Johnson and Tierney. In fact, for the purposes of the definition that shall be further presented, the role of perceptions must necessarily be left outside the notion of victory in war.

In The meaning of military victory, Robert Mandel seeks to offer a more objective definition. Mandel distinguishes between two concepts of victory – military and strategic victory. While the first is restricted to the battlefield, the second is the most important for determining actual victory and, despite the title of his book, is what Mandel is most interested in scrutinizing. According to the author, strategic victory encompasses three main objectives. The first is political stabilization. As a result of this definition, the author suggests that Great Britain may not be considered victorious in the 1982 Falkland Islands War, since "Argentina was left in political shambles and had trouble getting back on its feet afterward" (Mandel, 2006: 12). The second are economic objectives and includes "solidifying assured postwar access to needed resources in the defeated state and successfully engaging in postwar rebuilding of the defeated state's economic infrastructure, integrating it into the regional and global

economy" (Mandel, 2006: 23). Finally, Mandel includes "social objectives" in his definition of strategic victory. According to him this would mean "reducing (…) ethnic, religious, or nationalist discord, and moving the country towards a reliance on civil discourse to resolve domestic and international agreements (…) align with widely accepted principles of justice" (Mandel, 2006: 25). Looking at this definition it is clear that Mandel would agree with a citation that he makes in his book stating that war is meaningless "if the countries attacked are not turned into better and safer places" (Mandel, 2006: 13). Therefore, according to Mandel account, the 1991 Gulf War was not a victory for the United States and its allies, because it didn't promote regime change and "the condition of the people in the defeated state in many ways deteriorated" (Mandel, 2006: 99). The 1999 Balkans War could not be considered victory as well because people there "did not see their lives tangibly improve" (Mandel, 2006: 102). The same reasoning applies to Afghanistan because it "is difficult to demonstrate convincingly that the overall conditions in the country or the region have dramatically improved" (Mandel, 2006: 104). As will become clear later on, the definition proposed here makes theoretically possible to affirm that cases like Falklands and Gulf War had a clear victor; in this case, Great Britain and United States respectively.

What Mandel fails to recognize is that, by his definition, there has never been a victory in any war in any period of history. The further that he goes is in admitting that victory in this terms "is very difficult to realize" as well as it "it is quite difficult to find a recent case providing a textbook example to emulate" (Mandel, 2006: 27 28). This is true, but not only because it is difficult to achieve, but because none of the objectives discriminated by Mandel may be present in the minds of the belligerents. The obvious and self evident reason is that wars are fought for several motives, ranging from more modest and short term to more audacious objectives like the ones enumerated by Mandel. In fact, it is pretty hard to imagine the Eritrean Ethiopian War of 1998 2000 or the Tanzanian invasion of Uganda in 1978 as having the intention of integrating these countries into "the global economy" or "reducing ethnic discords". El Salvador and Honduras fought a war in 1969 known as "The Football War"

because one of the reasons leading to the conflict is considered to be a soccer game between these two countries. Although it is disputed whether the war would have occurred regardless of that match, it is unquestionable that neither country had the objectives cited by Mandel in mind. Obviously these are only allegoric examples, and one could spend the whole day citing other examples to counter argue Mandel's point of view.

The solution that Mandel offers to this evident weakness in his argument is a distinction between total "premodern" and limited "modern" war, suggesting that the former is characteristic "prior to the emergence of modern nation state system" (Mandel, 2006: 36). Accordingly, a characteristic of premodern wars would be "impose foreign dominated government", "exploit economic resources", "enforce hierarchical social order", whereas the modern wars would be characterized by objectives like "allow self determined government", "develop economic reconstruction" and "promote progressive social transformation" (Mandel, 2006: 41). In reality, what Mandel characterizes as "modern" war, would be more appropriate called a "postmodern" conception of war in which maybe only the United States could be considered to live in and only by some extend. Although Mandel criticizes the United States for having troubles in achieving his definition of "strategic victory" one may wonder which country would have a better record. The fact that Mandel's notion of postmodern war entails a postmodern notion of victory makes this concept less useful since it cannot be applied to any war in the past, leaving historians with no functional tool for assessing victory.

The distinction between military and strategic victory has been made before Mandel. Metz and Millen (2003) for example, applied this definition to some historical events. According to the authors, "Napoleon failed to assure strategic victory because was unable or unwilling to undertake the alteration of Prussian, Austrian, or Russian societies that would have consolidated his triumphs" (Mets; Millen, 2003: 22). The same would be true regarding to World War I, since the Western allies "did not have the will to turn it into strategic victory by altering the elements of German society and culture that spawned armed aggression" (Mets; Millen, 2003: 23). There are two main

difficulties with this argument. The first relates to a contextualization issue, since the authors are applying a modern concept to specific historical situations in which this notion did not exist. The second and this applies to the notion of strategic victory in general is that this idea implies that victory cannot be achieved unless one side is willing to undertake the normally herculean task of altering the societies and institutions of the other side. Moreover, there is no guarantee that transforming the defeated state will make victory endure. Probably, if every country in the world accepted this notion of victory, we would have longer, costlier and, perhaps, bloodier wars. Imagine the effects of this definition when applied to any of the Israeli-Arab wars of the twentieth century. This would mean that not only one could not consider Israel the winner of, for example, the 1948 war, but that for considering it so, Israel would have had to take the steps necessary for transforming Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan and Iraq internally in a manner consistent with its interests. This makes patent that both Metz-Millen and Mandel's notions of strategic victory seems to be far from offering a broader, acceptable and even a manageable definition of victory in war.

3 COMING TO A DEFINITION OF VICTORY IN WAR

How then, can we arrive at a definition of victory in war that has these characteristics? How can we seek to avoid, or at least reduce the uncertainties involved in the effort of assessing victory? The importance of this enterprise becomes evident when we see the difficulties in which many analysts see themselves when trying to set up a framework for defining victory. Small and Singer for example, in their well known studies about war, confessed that, when considering the victors, they relied on a "consensus among specialists". Although it is not clear who and how many specialists were consulted, it seems that it was discussed only among a few people (Albert; Luck, 1980: pp. 50 and 70). In my view, in order to come up with a satisfactory definition for victory in war it is necessary to go back to Clausewitz.

The Prussian general Carl Von Clausewitz (1780 1831) was without any doubt one of the most influential (some would say without running the risk of exaggeration, the most influential) writers on war. His posthumous book On War is recognized as a watershed in the literature on this subject. As it was the widespread rule among writers dealing with the topic of war until then, Clausewitz's writings reveal a great degree of concern over battlefield issues and often used the notion of victory to make references to things like the enemy's loss of moral and physical forces. Clausewitz understood war as a "duel on a extensive scale" whose "aim is to disarm the enemy" (Clausewitz, 1956: 4) in order to "compel our opponent to fulfill our will" (Clausewitz, 1956: 2). Consequently, in a certain point of the book, when explicitly considering the question of victory, he states: "The precise definition of this conception can be better explained hereafter in the consideration of the combat. Here we content ourselves by denoting the retirement of the enemy from the field of battle as a sign of victory" (Clausewitz, 1956: 109). His clearly cautious words reveal that he was not absolutely comfortable with this definition. Further, Clausewitz suggests that victory can have different meanings: "a victory which is intended to weaken the enemy's armed forces is a different thing from one which is designed only to put us in possession of a position" (Clausewitz, 1956: 110). Clausewitz does not present a single explicit and concise definition of victory in war, and following the common sense of the time he often related victory to the defeat of the enemy.

Although Clausewitz was mostly concerned about the purely military aspect of war and defined victory largely in military terms, what eventually made him so relevant is the fact that he clearly understood that war could only be considered as a mean to achieve an objective, and never as an end in itself. In other words, out of the several ways one state can achieve a desired objective, war is one of them. And building upon these considerations he came up with his over cited but often forgotten definition of war. Ultimately, war, Clausewitz famously stated, is only "a continuation of policy by other means" (Clausewitz, 1956: 23). With this simple assertion, the Prussian general put war under perspective and offered the key for its proper study from the point of view of the political scientist. War is not an end, but only a mean for pursuing an end whose definition lies

in the political object, i.e., "war is the means, and the means must always include the object in our conception" (Clausewitz, 1956: 23). The end is always the political object, the purpose of the state driving his decision to fight another state. Therefore, the political object is what should drive all the means employed by the state which implies that policy is "interwoven with the whole action of war" (Clausewitz, 1956: 23). In addition, it is the size of the political object that must determine the size and duration of the military enterprise. If the political object is too ample, the effort to be made will be equivalent, for, according to Clausewitz, "it is the nature of things that a great end requires a greater expenditure of force than a small one" (Clausewitz, 1956: 33). Statesmen should be able to know to adjust the means employed with the desired end. As Clausewitz puts it: "the political object, as the original motive of war, will be the standard for determining both the aim of the military force and also the amount of effort to be made" (Clausewitz, 1956: 11).

The clausewitzian notion of war gave to it a meaning that went beyond the merely physical fight. It took the focus out of the generals and put it on statesmen. War should henceforth be considered strictly as a "political act" (Clausewitz, 1956: 12). As general himself, while Clausewitz had high regard for the role of military commandants, he stressed that "the political objects belong to the Government alone" (Clausewitz, 1956: 26). Thus, Clausewitz highlighted, wars may involve such things as passion, instinct, courage, talents and reason. But while the first two belong to the people and the following two belong to the generals and his army, the last has to be characteristic of the statesmen. Only by understanding war as a mean for a political end, can it make any sense. More than that, this is the only way of understanding the wars of the past, "of unlocking the great books and make it intelligible" (Clausewitz, 1956: 25). Clausewitz understood that if the political object was lost during the course of battles for any reason, it could not be considered a war anymore but a senseless thing without an objective.

These statements were so significant that, when referring to the studies of war, we can talk about a pre and post clausewitzian periods. While in the pre- clausewitzian era it was usual to talk about war mostly in military terms, the post-clausewitzian period set a

whole new standard as the meaning of victory should henceforth be understood as a political, and not merely military achievement. In addition Clausewitz definition of war contains in itself the indication for where to look when assessing victory – which is not true for some other definitions that concentrates in the "duel" aspect, like Timasheff's, who describes war as "means of solving an inter state conflict by measuring the relative strength of the parties" (in Albert; Luck, 1980: 51). O'Connor clearly captured the essence of the clausewitzian revolution when he observes that: "In stressing the subordination of military to political ends, the theorists, reacting against what they regarded as a tendency for war to become ultimate or absolute, were laying the foundation for reappraisal of victory by applying the criterion of statecraft rather than hostilities" (O'Connor, 1972: 142). O'Connor correctly notices that the activities in the battlefield are only one dimension of a broader enterprise. Therefore, drawing from Clausewitz, we must understand victory as the achievement of the political objective set by either one of the belligerent states or alliance of states. Evidently this definition per se does not represent a great novelty given the fact that in the post clausewitzian era victory has often been referred to as the attainment of political goals. Nevertheless, as we have seen earlier, there is a grey area when it comes to defining victory because it is a word that can be applied to many situations. Thus, the definition of victory presented here can help us to avoid two common mistakes.

The first mistake that this definition helps to avoid is forgetting the preeminence of the political element of war. This is a common mistake that afflicts those who focus on the military element or other peripheral factors. Since victory is related to the achievement of the political objective set by either one of the belligerent states or alliance of states, the military element has an essential but subordinate role. It is essential because the objective cannot be achieved without success in the battlefield. It is subordinate, because if the political objective is not attained one cannot talk about victory. In other words, victory in the battlefield is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for victory in war. With this in mind, we can address the four categories of meanings mentioned earlier in this article that Carroll found for victory in war:

"(1) victory as interpreted in a purely military sense; (2) victory as a relationship between the belligerents; (3) victory as a relationship between war aims and war outcome; and (4) victory as interpreted in terms of gains and losses, without reference to war aims." (Carroll, 1969: 305). The first definition is our necessary condition and cannot be counted as a separate category. The second definition seems tautological, and Carroll cites as examples of it things like: "capitulation or submission of opponent's forces" and "imposition of dictated terms of armistice" (Carroll, 1969: 305) which we can consider as a consequence of military victory and, again, not as a separate category. Relative gains and losses without references to war aims are clearly out of our definition. Moreover, it wouldn't be a satisfactory framework for understanding a hypothetical U.S. success in the current Iraq War, for example. Assuming that Iraq becomes a stable democracy, the United States will have spent billions of dollars in this task – it would be hard to determine actual gains and losses in this situation and yet there would be one clear victor. The issue of war costs and considerations about costs and benefits are not part of our definition. Victory can be more or less costly, but still is victory if the political object is attained. During the Vietnam War the number of North-Vietnamese casualties was about twenty times more than America's, but the North Vietnamese were the ones who achieved its political objective of uniting Vietnam under communist rule. Thousands of Americans died during the American Revolutionary War but the political objective of achieving independence from Great Britain – which was actually set during the course of the war – was attained and victory was reached. Therefore, we are left only with Carroll's third definition and instead of fifteen meanings grouped under four categories, we now have only one which makes things considerably easier for future analysis.

When the centrality of the political objective is recognized, all other elements are treated as secondary. One of them is the public perception, a factor that apparently Clausewitz was aware of when he state that "The political object will be so much the more the standard of aim and effort, and have more influence in itself, the

more the masses are indifferent, the less that any mutual feeling of hostility prevails in the two States from other causes" (Clausewitz, 1956: 12). This interesting observation by Clausewitz indicates that the less the public has influence over the war, the more explicit the political end becomes. In modern mass democracies the influence of the public has reached a level that the Prussian general probably would had never think of, and therefore the political object of war is often clouded. Nonetheless, it still should be the essential standard for evaluating outcomes. Another element that is of secondary importance in the definition proposed hereby is, as mentioned above, the question of costs – both human and financial – because it is related to the means and not the ends of war. Evidently, moral concerns about the means employed are important – for example, were Hiroshima and Nagasaki necessary for defeating Japan? Some would argue that it shortened the war and spared future lives; others will say that it was unnecessary and immoral. However important these considerations may be, it is outside the definition of victory. In other words, adversities related to the means are obviously a concern for the citizens living that particular moment, but the major concern for the historian or the political scientist when assessing victory must always be the ends.

The second mistake that the definition stated here helps to avoid is seeking to link victory to the achievement of a specific objective. This is the kind of mistake that is incurred by Mandel's notion for instance. Our definition serves the purpose of remembering that the meaning of victory cannot be fixed or attached to any particular objective that would fit everyone, since the political objective varies. Defining victory as the achievement of the political objective set by either one of the belligerent states or alliance of states means that the political objective is not predetermined, i.e., victory cannot be defined by the conquest of another state, gaining territory, the destruction of the enemy or by building a stable democracy. It can be all these things and can be none of them – it depends upon what is the political goal that the state or alliance of states seeks when entering into war. As a result, the meaning of victory in war is not static, but dynamic. That's why for example, while we

cannot talk about victory in the current Iraq War, we can say that the United States and its allies achieved victory in the 1991 Gulf War, given that all the stated political goals were achieved. Yetiv, when assessing the results of that war, reached the following conclusion:

President Bush asserted that the United States had four main objectives. The first was the unconditional withdrawal of all Iraqi forces from Kuwait. That was accomplished. The second was the restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government, which was also achieved. The third was the maintenance of the security and the stability of the region, while the forth was the protection of the lives of Americans abroad. The United States achieved the third and fourth objectives if we focus on the short run. The picture becomes less clear as we extend the time period of examination" (Yetiv, 2004)

Therefore, all the political objectives that led to that war were achieved by one of the belligerents, which meet the requirements of our definition. Conversely, as Yetiv notices, two of the objectives were clearly attained only if we focus on the short run. The problem of extending the time period of examination does pose a challenge to the definition of victory stated here. After all, it is this consideration that led many to believe that the United States should have "marched into Bagdad" during the Gulf War and "finished the job". Besides, it is the time period issue that led Mets and Millen to conclude that Napoleon had not really achieved victory since he didn't take further steps to transform "Prussian, Austrian, or Russian societies" (Mets; Millen, 2003: 22). This same line of reasoning is used by many analysts when considering the results of World War I, claiming that the unskillful management of defeated states, Germany in particular, created the conditions for the Second World War twenty years later.

The problem with this claim is that none these actions (toppling Saddam Hussein, transform Russian or Germany societies) were necessary to achieve the political objectives set for those wars. Again, we should remember Clausewitz's conception of adjusting the military effort to the political object of war. But the problem of the time period remains – how can we talk about victory if the objective that is secured now can be lost in the future? This is an extremely important consideration that has been responsible for a great part

of the mystification around the notion of victory and has led many analysts to resort to the idea of “strategic” (for example, Mandel, 2006; Metz and Millen, 2003) or “grand strategic” (for example, Martel, 2007) victory. Although this concept is important, it would add an unnecessary complication to our parsimonious definition. What can be said in this respect is that victory may be transitory, but is victory anyway. We must set a finite horizon for victory, otherwise the concept becomes hard to manage. That’s why the outcome of World War I, for example, must be understood as a clear victory for the allies, whatever happened twenty years later.

To illustrate the time period problem let’s consider the Gulf War we just mentioned. All political objectives set forth by the United States had been achieved by the employment of force in that specific event – which means they were victorious by our definition. Let’s now suppose that in the following year Iraq had invaded Kuwait. Would that have meant that the victory achieved in the previous year has now to be reclassified? Not at all, according to the notion proposed here. This would have meant that in that particular war the United States achieved its stated objectives and that it now would have the choice to start another war in order to achieve again the objective of Iraq’s withdrawal. Hypothetically, this situation could happen every year, with every war having a winner. In the real world though, by the second Iraqi invasion probably the United States would have changed its strategy in order to secure its political objective in the more long run. Notice that our example supposes the invasion of Kuwait in the year following the war. But what if it occurred ten, twenty or fifty years later? What is the proper length of time after which victory can be claimed? This is why we must set a finite horizon for victory or else the term may become meaningless. If one state has the political goal of annexing a territory and this goal is achieved by means of war, it should be considered a victory even though the same territory is lost two years later. It is clear however, that some objectives may require a greater horizon of time than others – such is the case in the current Iraq War that will be explored further on. But first, I shall address some weaknesses of the definition proposed here.

4 SOME WEAKNESSES OF THE DEFINITION

Defining victory fundamentally in terms of the achievement of the political goals stated by either one of the belligerents poses the immediate problem of how to recognize the real objectives and how to assess the results in order to compare stated objectives and results. Furthermore, the political object may change during the course of war, which creates yet another difficulty for the analyst.

Concerning the problem of how to recognize the real political object of war, at first examination this seems to be less of a problem in democratic states since supposedly the open debates within a democracy should make the objective more clearly identifiable. Nonetheless, the fact that it is common for democracies to use moral justifications for going to war may make things blurrier. Once again, it is fundamental to have in mind that wars are means of achieving political goals, which leaves moral aims out of the equation. Hence, the task of the analyst is to detect the real political objective among the myriad of moral justifications that democracies may have for convincing its citizens that it has to go to war. Following Max Weber characterization of politics, we could consider a political goal every activity related to "striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state" (Weber, 1965: 2). Therefore, objectives like "world peace, "make the world safe for democracy" or "war to end all wars" are nice slogans but not clearly political objectives. On the other hand, conquering a territory, stopping an aggression, find weapons of mass destruction or building a democracy are some examples of political objectives. The problem of how to assess the results of war depends largely on the complexity of the pursued objective – while finding weapons of mass destruction is obviously identifiable, building a democracy is a far more complicated matter to assess, as the following session of this article intends to demonstrate.

Regarding the changing of political objective during the course of the war, this is fully compatible with the definition proposed here as there is no requirement that the political object should remain the

same since the beginning of the war – only that is the political object that should guide war efforts. Clausewitz was aware of this matter:

> Now, if we reflect that war has its root in a political object, then naturally this original motive which called it into existence should also continue the first and highest consideration in its conduct. Still, the political object is no despotic lawgiver on that account; it must accommodate itself to the nature of the means, and though changes in these means may involve modification in the political objective, the latter always retains a prior right to consideration (Clausewitz, 1956: 23).

Nevertheless, a distinction needs to be made between backing down and deliberately changing the political objective of a war. While the first is a decision taken as a clear sign of the difficulty in attaining the desired objective, the second indicates that the state believes that a new political objective – more modest or more audacious may better serve its purposes. While the first is clearly an indication of weakness in the war the latter is a privilege of the strongest. Evidently the line between backing down and shifting to a more modest object is usually quite blurry. One way to try to differentiate them is asking to what measure the more modest objective affects war accomplishments by the time of the change, that is, whether it has a negative effect compromising in some way those accomplishments, or if it does not compromise war accomplishments to that point.

It's worth noticing that even though defining victory by the attainment of political goals may have some obvious difficulties, the minimal contribution of thinking in these terms is giving the analyst at least some indications on where to look when considering victory in war. Instead of trying to measure gains and losses, comparing some given set of objectives with the results of the war, evaluating public perceptions or resorting to some vague "consensus among specialists", the definition aforementioned offers some basic guidelines for the often complex task of assessing victory.

5 VICTORY AND DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Now we have the theoretical tools to think about the dilemma posed at the beginning of this article. The U.S. led coalition invaded Iraq in the twentieth of March of 2003 and seized the capital less than a month after that. By April 13, the last town that was not yet controlled by the coalition was taken and on April 15 the war could have been claimed officially over. In fact, in a speech in California on May 1, 2003, President Bush declared "Mission Accomplished". Why this apparent remarkable success could never be called victory? The answer lies within the political objectives of the war.

The Iraq War had four main political objectives: destroy Saddam Hussein's regime, find and destroy weapons of mass destruction, preserve Iraq's ability to supply oil and create a stable and peaceful democracy (Martel, 2007: 246). While the first objective was easily accomplished, the second proved so far to be a brutal intelligence error and the third, although it seems to be facing some obstacles, is not intractable. The major problem for declaring victory in the case of Iraq is the fourth objective.

In the State of the Union speech in January of this year, President Bush clearly stated that the goal of Iraq War "is a democratic Iraq that upholds the rule of law, respects the rights of its people, provides them security, and is an ally in the war on terror" (White House, 2007). In a speech some days earlier, he was much more explicit about the goal and its connection to the meaning of victory. In a phrase that visibly demonstrates Bush's administration awareness of the impact of its stated political goals on the achievement of victory, President Bush asserted:

> Victory will not look like the ones our fathers and grandfathers achieved. There will be no surrender ceremony on the deck of a battleship. But victory in Iraq will bring something new in the Arab world – a functioning democracy that polices its territory, upholds the rule of law, respects fundamental human liberties, and answers to its people. A democratic Iraq will not be perfect. But it will be a

> country that fights terrorists instead of harboring them – and it will help bring a future of peace and security for our children and our grandchildren. (White House, 2007)

Thus, we are before a tremendous difficult objective to achieve – one political object that Clausewitz would have never dreamt of. For building a democracy presupposes first a series of previous political goals-from the complete surrender of the enemy and control of the state to the rebuilding of its political institutions. Furthermore, stating the political goal of democracy building entails three major complications. The first and most evident is the problem of defining democracy. What exactly means building a democracy? When do we know that a democracy has been built and the objective has been achieved? This latter question relates to the second complication – democracy building tends to extend the war because logically it extends the length of time necessary to achieve the political objective. Finally, there is the cultural argument that democracy may not be suited for every society.

The first complication – of defining democracy – is a self evident problem that has been haunting political scientists until these days and won't be further developed in this article. The most important thing here is that it seems to be widely accepted today that democracy is a system of governance that goes beyond the merely act of voting. For if voting was the only requirement we could say that the objective of building a democracy in Iraq has been accomplished since elections were held there. In his famous essay about "polyarchy" Robert Dahl (1956) stressed the importance of not only constitutional prerequisites for a democratic order, but of social prerequisites as well. As a result, Dahl argued, "polyarchy is a function of the total social training in all [it's required] norms" (Dahl, 1956: 76). The difficulty of assessing the point a state has become "democratic" poses an obvious challenge for attaining the political goal of building a democracy and thus, declaring victory. Besides, even though Iraq is not transformed in an ideal democracy – which is probably very unlikely – it could be transformed in a state with certain democratic characteristics. The problem then is what level of democracy is accepted in order to declare the mission accomplished?

The second difficulty is a clear consequence of the latter. Rebuilding the institutions of a country in order to adequate it to a democratic setting takes time. But even more time is taken by the required – to use the words of Dahl (1956) – social training that goes together with it. Therefore, the political goal of building a democracy deepens the time period problem – it takes more time to achieve victory. That's why even though the United States have seized the capital, toppled the country's leader and controlled the major towns, the war cannot be considered to be terminated. After the easier task of destruction comes the harder enterprise of construction. And rebuilding a whole country would be an intricate endeavor by itself – adding the expected possibility of fighting an internal opposition makes matters even more complicated. Therefore, while the first – and fastest – phase is more dependent on conventional military force, the second and longest tend to resemble a policing force in its attempt to control internal violent opposition. At the same time, a whole new institutional setting must be built – a new political organization, constitution, laws, etc. Democracy cannot emerge in a week. In contrast, the time period issue is less of a problem for other political goals such as, for example, conquering a territory, which is largely dependent on conventional military capabilities and may happen the day following the beginning of the war. Also, replacing the existing regime with other regime than democracy is a less complex task. A dictatorship would pose fewer challenges to be put into effect since the concentration of power and use of indiscriminate force would make things more easily controllable. Whenever a state declares building "a functioning democracy" among its political goals, it must be prepared for a longer intervention. And the weaker the state is, the longer the intervention will likely to be, as the primary task of stabilization will be more problematical. Mandelbaum ingeniously observes that, comparing the cases of Germany and Japan in World War II with Iraq today, suggests that "there is an inverse relationship between the ease with which a country can be defeated militarily and the ease with which a new and better government can be established after its defeat" (Mandelbaum, 2005: 81).

Mandelbaum's observation leads to a third obstacle in democracy building: the cultural aspect. Can democracy be brought to any society, regardless of its historical experience? This article does not have the intent to answer this question, but proponents of democracy building in Iraq thinks that it can and often cite the examples of Germany and Japan in World War II to support their arguments. In replying to those who discredit the possibility of establishing a democracy in Iraq, Charles Krauthammer argues: "half a century ago, we heard the same confident warnings about the imperviousness to democracy of Confucian culture. That proved stunningly wrong. Where is it written that Arabs are incapable of democracy?" (Krauthammer, 2004: 15). Identical argument and question are posed by Norman Podhoretz: "In the aftermath of World War II the United States managed in a single decade to transform both Nazi Germany and imperial Japan into capitalist democracies [...] Why not the Islamic world?" (Podhoretz, 2004: 47).

In fact, the experiences of World War II represented a watershed in American foreign policy. However the centrality of democracy has been an evident characteristic of American foreign policy thinking since the earlier days of independence, it was the successful experiences in rebuilding Japanese's and Germany's institutions into capitalist democracies that made some analysts and policymakers believe it was possible to spread democracy through military means. That was mainly the rationale behind several of the U.S. interventions in Latin America during the Cold War. In fact, after the Cold War, for each American intervention the spectrum of democracy building has always been present, even though it wasn't stated in its initial objectives. As Mandelbaum argues:

> The United States did not embark on any of its post- Cold War interventions for the purpose of state-building. Once having accomplished the goals for which they had intervened, however, the American authorities found themselves driven to the task of state building by the force of circumstances [...]To prevent the return of the conditions that had led to the interventions, the United States felt obliged to try to promote these institutions (Mandelbaum, 2005: 73 74)

As a nation built under the auspices of democracy, representing not only a territorial space, but the "embodiment of an idea", the "civilizing mission" seemed to be an obvious corollary – wherever the United States intervened it should be seen not as conquerors but as liberators. The studies about U.S. interventions and it's intend to promote democracy are numerous and won't be dealt here. Nevertheless, as Peceny (1999) observes, a useful distinction needs to be made between "proliberalization" of authoritarian regimes versus positively promoting democracy. We could call the first a policy of *democracy promotion* and the second a policy of *democracy building*. As Peceny (1999) notices, the first goal is far less ambiguous. And, as has been pointed out earlier in this article, the second goal also carries a higher degree of difficulty, which makes harder to achieve victory. In this sense, the enterprise in Iraq could be considered the boldest political goal ever set by the United States in the post war period. While it is true that efforts of democracy promotion have been undertaken in a number of previous interventions, the Iraq case is unique for at least two main reasons. First, because of the already mentioned amount of effort involved to rebuild a whole country, from its material capabilities to its political institutions. As mentioned, this is not just a case of democracy promotion, but of democracy building whose closest historical examples are Germany and Japan after World War II. The second thing that makes Iraq a unique case is geography. Iraq is an extremely important player in the heart of the Middle East, while other efforts of democracy promotion or attempts to nation building, like Haiti and Somalia, have been made in countries of less relevance in the international system and never in the Middle East. What could explain this apparent change? Despite the fact that it is not clear whether this is a really permanent shift, there are probably several reasons that could explain what led the United States set such an audacious political goal. I would like to draw attention to two.

The first element that created the conditions for the undertaking of such a herculean task is the fact that, for the first time since World War II the U.S. government was able to articulate a war based on matters of national security. Although it is debatable whether transforming Iraq would contribute to winning the "War on Terror",

the fact that the United States was attacked in its own territory – which had never occurred since Pearl Harbor – created the conditions for justifying the invasion in terms of national security defense. The argument was that the continuation of Saddam Hussein's regime posed a threat to the security of the United States and therefore should be annihilated. But after Saddam, what? The standard American foreign policy answer was more than expected. Moreover, the line of reasoning behind theoretical constructions such as the "democratic peace theory" helped to reinforce the justification of the war in terms of national security. The difference between the Iraq case and cases like Somalia and Haiti are pretty clear given the fact that in both these latter cases the rationalization for intervention were mostly based on humanitarian terms with no direct threat to domestic security. As Samuel Huntington observes, for Americans "foreign policy goals should reflect not only the security interests of the nation and the economic interests of key groups within the nation but also the political values and principles that define American identity" (Huntington, 1981: 241). Therefore, interventions like those in Somalia and Haiti were made basically as a reflection of American political values which led the country to fight a number of "non-American" wars (Huntington, 1981: 242). Because those wars carried no direct connection to American security, the U.S. resolve went only to some extent, as particularly the case of Somalia makes more than evident. Thus, as Huntington points out, "the United States will only respond with unanimity to a war in which both national security and political principle are clearly at stake" which made World War II "the perfect war" since it was the only war that met this criterion in the history of United States (Huntington, 1981: 242). In this sense, the Iraq War is the closest approximation since 1945 and it gave the American government the possibility of waging a war both for national security reasons and for political principles. The main failure in this otherwise perfect equation is the fact that the attack wasn't carried on by a state but by a transnational terrorist network with cells in a number of countries, which led many analysts to argue that the invasion of Iraq was a divert from the main objective of combating international terrorism, and raised both international and, in a less extend, domestic opposition.

The second possible explanation that made the Iraq endeavor possible lies in the systemic level. It is unipolarity. Right after the end of the Cold War, Charles Krauthammer wrote about the "unipolar moment" that characterized the world then, affirming that it would be short:

> The bipolar world in which the real power emanated only from Moscow and Washington is dead. The multipolar world to which we are headed, in which power will emanate from Berlin and Tokyo, Beijing and Brussels, as well as Washington and Moscow, is struggling to be born. The transition between these two worlds is now, and it won't last long (Krauthammer, 1990).

This reflected the conventional analysis of the time, when there was no clarity about the kind of world ahead. At that moment, Germany and Japan were two great powerhouses often cited as possible new great powers in a coming multipolar world and the United States were viewed as a declining power. But the years went by, Japan faced an important crisis and Germany also didn't live up to the expectations. The United States in the meantime remained virtually unchallenged and growing even more powerful in relation to the rest of the world to the level that it's military spending surpassed all possible peer competitors combined, and its economy remained robust. The disparity of power was so evident that a decade later Krauthammer was confident enough to write that "the unipolar moment has become the unipolar era" (Krauthammer, 2002/2003: 17). A similar view is expressed by other authors less sympathetic to the idea of unipolarity such as Christopher Layne. In a 1993 essay, Layne (1993) confidently predicted that the "unipolar moment" would end somewhere between 2000 and 2010. In a more recent article, he adopted a considerably more moderate tone in terms of predictions, and has updated his predictions to around 2030 (Layne, 2006), which is a recognition that unipolarity is not only a fact, but that it is lasting more than many analysts initially thought.

Regardless of the debates around whether or not unipolarity characterizes the current international system, it is undeniable that the huge concentration of power in American hands that became evident after the demise of the Soviet Union gave the United States the opportunity to articulate its foreign policy without many of the restrictions of the bipolar era. While it is true that identifying unipolarity automatically with unilateralism may represent a conceptual confusion (Oudenaren, 2004) the fact is that September 11, 2001 has proved that whenever the United States feels that its own security is at stake, it may take whatever measures it thinks necessary – even though it means acting alone and displeasing some allies. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall the United States had never been seriously challenged by any state. When the challenge came, it was by a non-state actor – the response however, was by traditional means. It is not possible to conjecture whether the Iraq invasion would have occurred if the structure of the international system were different, but it is highly probable that the United States would have faced more serious obstacles for undertaking the political transformation of a vital player in the heart of the Middle East.

6 CONCLUSIONS

In this article, victory has been defined as *the achievement of the political objective set by either one of the belligerent states or alliance of states*. The earlier mentioned statement by Abraham Lincoln makes clear that the sixteenth president of the United States was aware of the consequences of this notion back in the 1860's. He prays for the war not to end until the political object is attained because if the war ended and the object was not attained, that would have meant anything but victory. While defining victory in these terms is not an innovation, it is important to underline two commonly overlooked factors. The first, is the centrality of the political objective in the notion of victory, which means that every other matters that concern the means, as important as they may be, must be treated as secondary when one tries to assess victory. The second aspect

that this definition seeks to emphasize is the fact that victory cannot be associated to the achievement of any predefined political goal, since it varies according to the objectives set by the belligerents. A consequence of this second feature is that it addresses what we called the time period problem. For the definition to be manageable it is necessary to admit that when the political goal is achieved, this should be considered as victory, regardless of future happenings. The notion of strategic victory, however relevant it may be, is not part of our definition, i.e., we admit that there is only one kind of victory in war and that is the one that relates to the immediate attainment of political goals set by one of the belligerents. This simplification is necessary since the notion of strategic victory seems to imply an infinite horizon of time, which makes the concept difficult to apply, except in some very rare circumstances. Moreover, strategic victory can only be assessed as a *post-factum* analysis given the fact that it is hard to predict future political developments after the ending of a war.

The definition proposed here can be applied to assess victory in any given war, no matter whether it has premodern, modern or postmodern characteristics. In this article this framework was used in order to examine the puzzle posed by the Iraq War and understand why despite an evident initial military success, victory could never be claimed. The reason for that is because democracy building was included as a political objective of the war. Three major obstacles in pursuing the goal of democracy building were pointed out: the problem in defining democracy and what level of democracy would be acceptable, the automatic lengthening of the war, and the question of whether democracy is suitable for every society. Next, an explanation on why the United States has embarked on the endeavor in Iraq – despite the aforementioned obstacles – has been tried. The American vision of world politics combined with the experiences of World War II contributed to provide the historical basis. More specifically, the possibility of articulating the war in terms of national security matters and the unipolar configuration of the international system were mentioned as two possible explanations for leading the United States to pursue such an intricate objective.

It has been mentioned here that the United States has a somewhat "postmodern" conception of war of which the Iraq case is a clear example. This conception has several of the elements that Mandel lays out under the "modern" label, and its main characteristic is the notion that the United States never fights a war to destroy or conquer countries, but to liberate them from tyranny and suffering. There is a whole literature dealing with this subject, especially with what is known as "American exceptionalism". But what is important for our purposes here is that this American notion of war has represented a major change in the traditional dichotomy victory defeat that is associated with it and therefore has brought a number of complications to analysts when trying to assess victory. Understanding victory not in relation to the situation of the opponent, but to the objectives of the victorious state transcends this traditional dichotomy and has the advantage of avoiding the necessity to continuously adjust the concept of victory in order to explain new situations (premodern, modern, postmodern), since the concept is adjustable per se.

Even considering all the problems indicated here about the United States achieving its political goal in Iraq, it has not been suggested that victory is impossible in this case. What then would an American victory in Iraq look like? Obviously, one cannot expect the constitution of a Switzerland like democracy; in fact, few countries in the world can claim to be "perfect democracies", if such a thing really exists. Any democracy that may take place in Iraq, as well as any nascent democracy, especially in a country that had never had this experience, and in a region with few examples to follow, will inevitably be imperfect. Any expectation beyond that is likely to be unrealistic. That being said, some basic steps are necessary before claiming victory. The first has already been taken – the organization of national elections and the subsequent establishment of an elected government. The next step is guaranteeing that the new government is able to provide the fundamental prerequisite of statehood – security. By the time of this writing, the last developments in Iraq apparently suggest some improvements in this respect if compared to the previous conditions, although the actual extend of those improvements is still not clear. The minimum test for whether Iraq

has been transformed in a kind of democracy however is when – after the coalition troops leave the country – an elected government peacefully steps down and turns the power over to another elected government. This has been referred as to the "two-elections test" and is developed in more detail by Huntington (1991). Victory or defeat in Iraq, therefore, is not only a matter of resolve but of time.

The purpose of this article was to cast some light in the debates surrounding the notion of victory in war. In the trajectory, many issues have been touched and at least two of them deserve further researches. The first is how to operationalize the political objectives of a state when it goes to war. While this problem has been partially addressed here when some weaknesses of the definition were pointed out, it requires more elaboration. The characterization offered here suggests that victory has been treated as a categorical variable assuming only two values – victory or not victory. This raises the question about whether "partial" victories could be a possible outcome. The second issue that deserves a closer scrutiny is the uniqueness of the Iraq War. This has been frequently gone unnoticed by the majority of analysis because promoting democracy is a characteristic of many American interventions, especially in Latin America, and because of the often cited references to Germany and Japan after the Second World War. There are however some important distinctions, besides the ones already mentioned earlier (level of compromise required by democracy building and geography). Victory in World War II was not related to the reconstruction of Germany and Japan. In fact, the objective of that war was unconditional surrender and destruction of their war power. The terms of their surrender weren't dramatically different from the First World War and the efforts of democratization started only after a couple of years after the war had ended. Besides, Germany had had a democratic tradition and it is a western country in the heart of Europe. In Japan, democracy came through a constitutional monarchy thus keeping the figure of the emperor, which has at least a symbolical importance. Therefore, the case of Iraq is not only unique for its particular characteristics and the sense of starting from scratch, but also because this is probably the first war whose victory is measured by the construction of a democracy.

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