

Analyse the meaning of victory in conflict in the information age. What has changed? What has remained unchanged? How information society and information warfare influences achieving the victory?

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The meaning of victory in conflict in the information age

Grade: --

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The Information Age, also commonly referred to as Computer Age or Digital Age, is characterized by the ability to transfer information freely and have instant access to a broader range of information (AudioEnglish.net n.d.). As war always has been a matter of access and utilization of information this age vastly changed the way modern wars are fought. Beginning with the introduction of television, radio and telephone the societies became more open and informed, which lately after the invention and spread of the personal computers lead to the rise of terms like *transparency* and *equality* (Andrieu 2007). Those values recently formed major movements in today's Western societies and lead to the fall of several dictatorships in North Africa.

Nowadays, additionally, society plays a bigger role for the question whether victory is achieved or not. Along with the upcoming of the Information Age the Western societies are also known as information societies, which aim to gain competitive advantages by accessing, creating and using information in a political, economic or cultural way better than their competitors (Encyclopædia Britannica Inc. 2012). Beside the continual importance of information even during the last centuries, the societies became recently more involved into political and economic changes. This influenced wars and formed a new understanding of victory and defeat.

The Information Age changed the way soldiers and armies act (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2008). With the upraise of the internet and the high impact of information only a small piece of not necessarily confidential information released by a sole person may already jeopardize whole military missions as seen in Afghanistan several times in beginning of 2012 (ZEIT Online 2012) (ARD 2012). Not only internal military operations and information may influence the on-going of a mission, but also freely available and published news may create serious troubles, such as the publishing of Muhammad cartoons by Jyllands-Posten in 2005 and Osama bin Laden's announcement to revenge this in 2008, which evoke serious and violent protests only two days later again in Afghanistan (FOCUS Online 2008).

Thus it is evident that societies tend to react much faster on news and leaked information. Subsequent to a series of information leaks and bad publicity with US soldiers involved in Afghanistan their reputation highly decreased leading to less acceptance within Afghan society and the consideration of the US being an occupation force. In 2005 68 percentages of Afghans said the US army is doing a good job; four years later in 2009 only 32 percentages can agree with this statement (Westdeutscher Rundfunk 2009). Therefore, in order to achieve victory, a more ethical army (no desecration of corpses, no burning of Koran, gain of a deep understanding of the operating area including religious and cultural characteristics) has to be established or, if misconduct is committed

anyway, an information leakage has to be strictly avoided and strategies for countermeasures have to be worked out.

As pointed out one key to a victory is the society. As Afghanistan is a war, which aimed at introducing democracy and other Western standards into society and reflects a new feature of 21st century's wars, redevelopment and humanitarian aid are major *post-war* strategies to keep the gained influence in the targeted area and allow a rebuild of the nation. This new constellation also leads to a different definition of what might be a victory, because the initial aims of wars have changed over time. A modern war is generally meant to reintroduce law and order in an unmaintainable or threatening area (Israel's Lebanon War, Anti-Pirates mission in Sudan, Iraq) as well as for peacekeeping purposes (KFOR in Kosovo, Afghanistan). Compared to earlier stages in history a war is not fought for gaining total control over an area or state, but rather to introduce legal and governmental institutions and reassign power to the people after a reasonable period of time (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2008).

Taking those new aims of a war a victory may only be achieved if a region is stabilized and better off after the military operation. If the external military actor loses acceptance and cannot come up with major improvements including better living conditions, less crimes, stable governmental institutions and basic economy with additional jobs a total or partly loss is likely. Again it is arguable what characterizes a loss or victory as media is currently undecided if the Afghanistan mission is a success or failure. Even though it is unopposed that the military operation was a success, the overall mission may fail (Foreign Policy 2012) (Asia Times Online 2010).

As the Afghanistan example illustrates is success or failure – victory or loss –nowadays interrelated to the public and societal perception. This means that an attacker may gain victory just by overtaking the medial control. But even without high scale access to radio or television systems propaganda and invalid information may be spread by infiltrating lobbies or gaining access to people in power. Also the idea of nationalism can be utilized to break the enemy's society splitting it into several ethnical, religious or in another way differentiated groups and animating them to start riots up to civil wars.

On a more military level victory may be achieved by gaining access to the so-called centre of gravity, a term coined by Clausewitz (Osgood 1998). The method's idea remained unchanged since it was first mentioned, but the understanding of what is this *centre of gravity* has advanced (Echevarria II 2002). Generally this means attacking a spot of higher interest including the enemy's economic system (e.g. currency (Burke 1988)), power and other infrastructural networks, logistics or media (e.g. television and radio). Additionally, the access to most sensitive data and information is of highest interest and strategic advantage. Also in earlier time was the key to victory the access and utilization of public or confidential information. Thou the way to access them changed dramatically during the last 30 years.

In a more and more globalized and via internet highly interconnected world is the information as well as the centre of gravity often accessible and attackable remotely. Several techniques exist for gaining access to critical systems and those valuable data including military and intelligence operations using social engineering, hacking and cyber-attacks.

As in past decades victory still means gaining access to critical infrastructure and information. Additionally, further elements play a major role nowadays. The biggest change is the impact the Information Age has on the population and how an informed or misinformed society can make the difference between failure and success of a military operation. Latest missions saw an alternation in respect to their aims, which are recently mostly humanitarian and peacekeeping. Thus, new and additional post-war strategies have to be applied including aid provision, country rebuilding and a perspective for self-government. In today's warfare psychological and cyber-based attacks are heavily used and important for achieving victory.

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