
STRATEGIC ENIGMA OF
WINNING WAR OR PEACE
CONFLICT
VIOLENCE
DESTRUCTION
HUMAN COST
UNCERTAINTY
WHICH PATH TO CHOOSE ?
PEACE
STABILITY
DEVELOPMENT
HARMONY
PROSPERITY
PEOPLE
TRUST
INCLUSIVITY
DEVELOPMENT
LASTING PEACE
PATH TO WIN WAR
PATH TO WIN PEACE
"Peace is not the absence of war, but a positive, dynamic process of building a better society."
– Kofi Annan
"The highest form of victory is to win without fighting."
– Sun Tzu
ASSAM RIFLES
SENTINELS OF THE NORTH EAST
Brigadier Sanjay P Vishwasrao
Commander 22 Sector Assam Rifles
2015
SECURE
PEOPLE
SAFE LAND
BRIGHTER TOMORROW

The Strategic Enigma of Winning War or Peace

Originally written in 2015. Adopted in 2026 for a broader audience

Why Winning the Contest Is Not the Same as Winning What Comes After

Sanjay P Vishwasrao, Major General, Retired

Written in 2015 as Brigadier, while setting the vision for his second peace-winning campaign command — 22 Sector, Assam Rifles, Assam–Manipur (2015–2016) — following his first at 18 Rashtriya Rifles, Lolab, Kupwara (2006–2008).

> *"Only with a strategy of taking the whole will the general find complete victory."*
>
> **— Sun Tzu**



Pied Piper/ Strategic Soldier Effect on Display:
Girl students of all tribes/ non-tribes follow Brigadier Sanjay P Vishwasrao on his farewell visit to St Agnes Higher Secondary School, Haflong, October 2015.
He had earned their love and respect while teaching them #AllTribesOneIndia 2015-2016.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT FOR TODAY'S READER

This paper was written in 2015 as the author set the vision for his second field command built around winning peace, not just winning engagements — at 22 Sector, Assam Rifles, having already applied the same thinking at 18 Rashtriya Rifles, Lolab, in 2006–2008. Its central argument — that a tactical or even military win only becomes real victory once it is converted into a lasting, accepted outcome — proved out again during India's response to the Pakistan-sponsored Pahalgam terrorist attack of 22 April 2025, where the distinction between winning an engagement and winning the underlying contest was, once more, the decisive strategic question.

Introduction

The Changing Face of Victory. Up to the 19th century, when kings declared wars and defined victory, decisive military victory held sway — annihilation of the enemy until no further resistance was possible. After the Napoleonic wars, victory came to be defined by the people (and the media), for whom war is ultimately about peace and prosperity. In the 21st century's ideological, non-state conflicts, victory is not simple to imagine, define, convey, plan for, or even claim — 9/11 for Al-Qaeda and Operation Neptune Spear for the United States are both cases in point — and conceptualising peace is harder still.

Ways and Means for Victory and Peace. The nature of the victory sought shapes the entire conflict — the ways and means chosen to fight it. Both Sun Tzu and Clausewitz warned against starting a war without absolute clarity on the desired end state, even though the ingredients of victory may shift as the war progresses. As Antoine-Henri Jomini explained, victory today is less about destroying the enemy's forces and more about imposing one's own will — destruction of the enemy's military is a limited means to a larger end. War, therefore, cannot be only about warfare; it must pay at least as much attention to the peace it is meant to secure. Twentieth-century wars proved that

national and allied victories were always about more than success on the battlefield — Pakistan's surrender at Dhaka in 1971 and the shock-and-awe of Operation Enduring Freedom both illustrate the limits of force as a means, and the short shelf-life of even a decisive military win.

Questions Worth Asking. How should victory be defined? Is victory over Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) defined differently to victory in conventional war? What is the relationship between military and political victory — and has nuclear deterrence and the hybridisation of warfare changed that relationship? When should war-fighting stop, to make room for peace-building? What should we take from Winston Churchill's 'our policy is to wage war' and 'victory at all costs,' set against Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'victory for us means victory for religion... for the institution of democracy' and 'we are determined not only to win the war, but to maintain the security of the peace that will follow'? How, in short, does one win both the war and the peace?

Lessons in Planning Wars That Win Peace

The Utility of Decisive Military Victory to Policy. Wars are conflicts between societies, and can only be understood by examining the ideologies of the societies fighting them — the meaning and roots of victory and defeat are not to be found on the battlefield. If the military is simply a vehicle of pain used to secure compliance, is the value of a military victory to policy directly proportional to how total that victory is? Sun Tzu warned that war has an inherent tendency to escalate, independent of policy, logic or military prudence; Clausewitz, for his part, insisted that 'the objective of war is first and foremost to further policy.' Yet wars are routinely fought for total military victory at the expense of the political goals that started them — the ten-year Iran–Iraq War is one example. Egypt's 1973 crossing into Sinai shows the opposite: a 20-day war that ended in the Camp David Accord, in

which Egypt secured both of its real political objectives — a peace dialogue with Israel and leadership of the Arab world — despite a military defeat. North Vietnam proved the same point in 1975: the militarily weak and defeated can still win. It is worth asking whether Pakistan applies this same logic to its own account of the Kargil War.

Fallacies That Keep Military Victory from Becoming Political Victory. Several recurring fallacies stop a military win from converting into a lasting political one:

- Ignoring the relevance of Just War theory to winning both war and peace (Nazism, and the absence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq).
- Overestimating the payoff of military power (Napoleon in Russia; the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor).
- Underestimating the true cost of war (the Second World War; the second Gulf War).
- Miscalculating how people will perceive victory or defeat (American public opinion on Vietnam), and assuming a defeated people will simply accept defeat (Israel's wars with Hezbollah and Hamas) — the Pakistan Army has convinced its own citizens that it has been victorious in every war against India.
- Believing it will be easy to replace the political system of a defeated state (the second Gulf War and the ensuing Global War on Terror, GWOT).
- Assuming the victorious state's post-war political arrangements will win international recognition automatically (the division of Germany; the creation of Israel).
- Presuming a peace treaty ends a war — it only ends the present round of it (the Tashkent and Shimla Accords with Pakistan).

- Assuming a defeated people will simply adopt the victor's value system (Operation Enduring Freedom).

Imposing Our Will, Not Destroying the Enemy. Clausewitz defined victory in terms of 'will,' not destruction. He also argued that war must end through diplomatic and political effort that makes the victory acceptable and sustainable — victory has to translate into real leverage over the opponent. How much leverage is achieved depends on the enemy's resilience, morale and willpower; total compliance is only possible once the enemy's physical and ideological centres of gravity have been sufficiently degraded. Victory is not freedom for unopposed violence (the Holocaust), but the freedom to secure one's own interests — democracy for NATO, or a caliphate for ISIS, each from its own side of the argument. The clearest illustration is the contrast between the American victory over Japan in 1945 and over Iraq in 1991: Japan has not broken the world's trust since, whereas leaving Saddam Hussein in power in 1991 sowed the seeds of the second Gulf War (Saddam himself claimed 1991 as a victory). Two lessons follow for today's policymakers: first, the political end state of a war must be defined explicitly at the outset; second, political control over the war — including how and when it ends — is non-negotiable for success. Nuclear deterrence and the hybridisation of warfare mean decisive military victory may now be neither achievable nor even desirable, and that limited goals which help impose one's will may be more realistic — though a purely defensive posture against a determined, hostile neighbour is unlikely to win the peace either.

CORPORATE LENS — YOUR 'WILL' IS YOUR PRODUCT

Substitute 'product' or 'proposition' for 'will' and this argument transfers almost unchanged: a company does not win a market by destroying every competitor, but by getting the market to accept its product, standard or narrative as the one worth adopting. A rival that is out-competed but not converted will re-enter the market the moment conditions allow — precisely as an undefeated ideology re-emerges after a military win. The real objective, in business as in Clausewitz's war, is imposed acceptance of your offer, not the elimination of everyone who once offered something else.

Means, Will, Hope and Time. Beyond the physical dimension, victory also has a moral one — will and hope. Material loss erodes morale, which drives further material loss, with each cycle deepening the last. As long as will and hope survive, the loss of means tends to produce a hybrid counter-attack rather than genuine defeat — the French resistance of 1940–44 and the ongoing Sunni insurgency in Iraq and Syria both illustrate this. Political victory follows military victory only once the enemy's means have been degraded (not necessarily destroyed), its will and hope broken, and the window for a counter-attack has genuinely closed — this is Sun Tzu's 'whole,' achieved with meaningfully higher residual combat power on the winning side. Was Sun Tzu describing a strategy of compellence, or of coercion — and has nuclear deterrence and hybrid warfare made the latter obsolete?

Winning Battles, Wars and Peace

Measuring Who Won and Who Lost. Victory and defeat sit at opposite ends of a scale with many positions in between. Winning a tactical battle is simple; winning a war is difficult; winning the peace is complex. Tactical battles always produce a winner and a loser; wars may produce both, either,

or neither (the United States and Iraq both claimed to have won the first Gulf War); peace, to last, has to be win-win for everyone involved. Robert Mandel has argued that the end state of a war has to be read through the cultural framework of each side involved — every group of opinion-makers (government, elites, allies, military, media, citizens, radicals) will read the same outcome differently, which makes any single assessment of victory genuinely difficult. A fuller assessment needs three separate scales:

- **Scale of Achievement (tactical/operational).** Runs from 'none' and 'negligible' through 'measurable' to 'significant' and 'total.' These outcomes are easy to measure and, once recorded, do not change.
- **Scale of Success (strategic).** Runs from 'defeat' and 'not lose' through 'tie' to 'win' and 'victory.' It is a cumulative product of many tactical and operational results, but those results alone do not guarantee strategic success — genuine strategic victory requires permanence, and can be revised if political beliefs shift over time.
- **Scale of Decisiveness (political).** Runs from 'exacerbate' and 'deteriorate' through 'status quo' to 'solution' and 'resolution.' This is the hardest scale to measure, and the one most likely to be revised as time passes.

CORPORATE LENS — THREE SCALES, ONE TEST

The same three-scale test applies directly to business outcomes: the scale of achievement is a project's operational metrics — units shipped, features delivered; the scale of success is market share and win-rate against competitors; and the scale of decisiveness is whether the market has genuinely and durably adopted your product as its standard, or is simply waiting for something better to come along. Many organisations report only the first scale and call it victory — which is exactly the fallacy this paper warns against.

Orchestrating a Win, Not Just a Victory. Victory has to be defined across all its component parts — perception, military, economic, diplomatic,

ideological and political — for it to become the foundation of an effective strategy. A nation's power of resistance is the product of its total means (military, scientific, economic, human) and the strength of its will (government, military, people). Victory is achieved once the enemy's resistance is degraded to an ineffective level, whether through the erosion of its means or the collapse of its will. Attacking an enemy's means is attrition warfare, and leaves the enemy's will intact — a long, costly path. Attacking an enemy's will, to make it quit, is manoeuvre warfare. Which should be broken first — means or will? And whose will — the government's, the military's, or the people's? Clausewitz's own answer stands: 'The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.' In conventional war, an attritionist approach targets **means**, while a manoeuvrist approach targets **will** — either way, the will of the enemy's government and military must ultimately be broken, as with Saddam Hussein and the Republican Guard in the second Gulf War. In unconventional war, it is the will — the belief — of the people supporting the cause that matters most, whether Sunni Muslims supporting ISIS or separatists in Kashmir. In either case, the enemy's military defeat is not strictly essential, but a visible, leverage-able setback usually is. Sun Tzu's own guidance — subdue the enemy without a fight, seek battle only after victory is already won, break the enemy's resistance without fighting, and attack the enemy's strategy — points toward a 'whole,' political victory: the enemy compelled to accept peace on terms that embrace one's own ideology or policy.

Shifting Gears from War-Fighting to Peace-Winning. General Douglas MacArthur was strategic when he said of post-war Japan, 'we must go forward to preserve in peace what we have won in war' — yet sounded purely

tactical a few years later, on Korea, when he said, 'in war there can be no substitute for victory.' That contradiction is exactly the difficulty in moving from war to peace. Sun Tzu's own caution applies: one does not have to be fully victorious in war to win the peace, nor does the enemy have to be rendered powerless for one's will to prevail. Political intent and military mission must be defined with precision from the outset; a simple order for 'decisive military victory' is easily misread — witness the excessive use of force in Vietnam, or the lack of preparedness for Iraq's Sunni insurgency after 2003. For peace to hold, a military victory must pass three tests: tactical attainability, strategic sustainability, and political usability. Focusing on attainability alone leaves victory to chance; sustainability is what political and military leaders should actually be optimising for. As Liddell Hart put it, 'if you concentrate exclusively on victory, with no thought for the after-effect, you may be too exhausted to profit from the peace.' The post-war military situation needs a clear definition of 'strategic success' and 'strategic advantage' at the strategic, operational and tactical levels alike, so the war itself is never conducted in a way that undermines the prospects for a lasting peace that follows it — as when war and soldiering come to serve themselves, or an uncertain political leadership, rather than the peace they are meant to secure. This is also how strategy keeps military means genuinely tied to political goals, with commanders balancing military effort against political effect through doctrine and metrics that evolve as the conflict does. As a war moves toward its end, grand strategy and military strategy have to be kept separate, so that policy is never captured by military aims. Ultimately, political-military success or failure at the strategic and operational level is judged by public opinion — Argentina's own public toppled the Junta that started, and lost, the Falklands War, a war the Junta had launched to distract from a domestic crisis in the first place. Liddell Hart's further warning holds too: 'imposing a peace of entirely your own choosing... will reverse the

settlement achieved by war,' as the Treaty of Versailles later demonstrated. A durable transition to peace needs a visible, minimum-essential military victory, a genuine political settlement, and justice for people on all sides — the last of these mattering more than the conduct of the war itself. Exactly when to shift from war-fighting to peace-winning is, in the end, an intelligence judgement for political and military leaders alike: shift too early and bargaining power is lost; shift too late and lives are lost needlessly.

CORPORATE LENS — WHEN TO MOVE FROM LAUNCH TO LOYALTY

Tactical attainability, strategic sustainability and political usability map directly onto product-market fit, durable competitive position, and genuine institutional or customer buy-in. A launch that clears the first test but not the other two — a product that ships but never earns a lasting position or real institutional adoption — is exactly the 'victory' this paper warns will not survive contact with the market. Knowing when a win is durable enough to shift resources from acquisition to retention is as much a judgement call in business as in Clausewitz's war.

Victory and Peace over 4GW. In 4GW, the end state may be easy to describe but hard to measure. Such conflicts typically end through the exhaustion of the people, an outright government military victory, a negotiated political settlement, or the removal of any incentive to fight on. Of 134 civil wars fought this century, 117 have ended — 81 (60%) through military victory, 24 (18%) through negotiated settlement, and 12 (9%) through ceasefire. That data suggests military victory in 4GW tends to serve people well in the long run, but it is not the whole truth: victory can never be final until the underlying ideology itself is defeated. For a committed adversary, time is never the constraint — as long as some means remain and hope in the ideology persists, defeat is incomplete and a future victory still assumed. Where means and hope both survive, the result is a perpetual

conflict, as with Pakistan's long-running proxy campaign against India. In a contest of ideologies, military victory has to lead to an ideological victory and a peace acceptable to everyone. The post-war political landscape must be shaped before and during the war's termination, not after it. The classical distinctions of just cause (jus ad bellum), just conduct (jus in bello) and just peace (jus post bellum) matter even more in 4GW, because culture shapes the ways, means, ends and very notion of victory far more than in conventional war. Excessive force tends only to strengthen the very ideas it was meant to defeat, as in Gaza. Political objectives must therefore dominate strategy, and strategists on every side need a clear-eyed understanding of what victory and non-victory actually mean to each other. Kinetic tools can destroy an enemy's will where it is nested in physical means relatively easily; destroying hope and ideology nested deep in belief is far harder, short of neutralising every believer — as in the final defeat of the LTTE in Eelam War IV. Because the physical components of 4GW victory are typically short-lived, the main effort has to focus on political and ideological victory: each tactical or operational win must be converted quickly into strategic, ideological success, or strategy will never truly balance the ends sought against the means available — as it failed to in Vietnam and Iraq. Sun Tzu's own formula, 'the victorious military is first victorious and only after that goes to battle,' describes exactly this: manoeuvring into a position of advantage so decisive that victory follows almost automatically, or is nudged into place by a single blow at the source of the enemy's power — its ideology. The loss of faith in that ideology is the real tipping point toward defeat, the victory that precedes the battle. Whether Sri Lanka's more attritionist approach to annihilating LTTE fighters ahead of its ideology proves Sun Tzu wrong, or whether it simply means a resurgence is still possible and the peace not yet fully won, remains an open question.

Lessons to Be Learnt. Weaker states or actors have won roughly 30% of all wars, generally through greater political resolve (the Vietcong) or the stronger side's wrong choice of counter-strategy (the Soviet Union in Afghanistan). Pakistan fits this pattern too: it treats retaining the ability to challenge India as victory in itself, and on that basis genuinely believes it has 'won' all four wars against India, its will and hope left intact each time. The wider lesson for strategists is that the exchange between military effort and political effect is inherently uncertain, because the other side may simply refuse to accept defeat on the terms one is willing to use to impose it — as the Vietcong, Saddam Hussein, the Taliban and Pakistan have all shown in their own ways. Conflicting perceptions of victory among stakeholders on both sides add still more uncertainty to the political effect any military action produces, and victory itself is hard to translate into a lasting political outcome — some signs of it are not easily visible, and early operational wins are routinely mistaken for strategic ones. There is no fixed formula for victory or peace, since every contest differs, and what works today will not necessarily work tomorrow simply because it worked today. The one durable truth is that better-led militaries — not merely technologically superior ones — tend to win: technology alone is not a driver of victory; political judgement and a genuinely better culture are the real force-multipliers.

Conclusion

Pakistan does not treat repeated failure to win as equivalent to losing, and the separatists it sponsors are encouraged by any victory but not discouraged by any defeat. In this asymmetry, a strategy of coercion by purely military means, aimed at what is fundamentally an ideological problem, has produced ongoing strategic dissonance. As the scholar C. Christine Fair has written of the Pakistan Army, defeat for it means only 'when it can no longer resist or attack India.' Seen through that lens, it is worth asking whether India's own victories in the wars with Pakistan have been tactical and operational wins

only, while Pakistan's underlying social belief in the idea of two separate nations continues to sustain its proxy war regardless. Why have those victories not proved strategically sustainable and politically usable? Are we failing to view our own victories, and Pakistan's defeats, through the lens of Pakistan's own strategic culture — and are we still treating counter-terrorist operations in Jammu & Kashmir as an end in themselves, rather than revisiting our strategy for the political objectives that the Armed Forces (Jammu & Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990, was meant to serve: victory over Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, and defeat of the secessionism and communalism it fuels?

End Note

Britain, under Churchill, won the Second World War but lost its empire; the United States, under Roosevelt, won the same war and went on to build a new world order around American values. The difference between the two was not the war itself, but strategic culture — the former tactically superb, the latter strategically superb. Winning the peace in India's own neighbourhood will similarly require building a genuinely Rooseveltian strategic culture: one built to design and execute a peace-based strategy of compellence, aimed at making Pakistan abandon its habit of initiating conflict with India in the first place.

RELEVANCE FOR TODAY'S BOARDROOMS AND INSTITUTIONS

Whether the contest is fought with soldiers or with salespeople, the same discipline decides who actually wins: define what victory means before the contest starts, measure it on more than one scale, and treat the win as provisional until the other side — or the market — has genuinely accepted your will, your product, or your proposition as the standard, not merely been out-fought or out-spent on a single occasion. This is the strategic discipline I bring to advising boards, governments and public institutions on how to convert a tactical win into a durable, accepted outcome.

"The first aim in war is to win, the second aim is to prevent defeat,
the third is to shorten it, and the fourth and most important,
which must never be lost sight of,
is to make a just and durable peace."

— Sir Maurice Hankey, 1950