

# THE COMPREHENSION OF VICTORY IN THE STRATEGIC CONCEPT OF TOTAL DEFENCE

Dano N. Mavrak<sup>1</sup>

---

Достављен: 13. 07. 2022.

Језик рада: Енглески

Кориговано: 16. 08, 27. 10. 2022.  
11. 01. 2023.

Тип рада: Прегледни рад

Прихваћен: 06. 04. 2023.

DOI број: 10.5937/vojdelo2301046M

---

Small states that base their defence strategy on the concept of total defence, even if they do not defeat a stronger opponent militarily, and in the course of an armed conflict deny the enemy an absolute victory according to their criteria, and at the same time protect their national interests, can consider such an outcome victory. Victory at strategic level is conditioned, and not entirely determined, by military victories at tactical and operational level. Claiming victory at strategic level is a qualitative and political perception of state leaders, while at a lower level it is mostly the subject of quantitative analysis by military commanders. By analysing the content of strategic and doctrinal documents, scientific publications, and then by comparative and historical analysis of the concepts of strategy and victory, their relationship and understanding in different historical eras has been shown. The historical comprehension of victory in the Republic of Serbia since the restoration of statehood in the 19th century until today has been particularly analysed. A multiple study (R. Serbia 1999–2022; Afghanistan 2001–2021; Iraq 2003–2022) in which the defenders' successes were analysed after the attack by an asymmetrically stronger armed force led by the US Armed Forces, has served as the basis for scientific generalisation and making a final statement about victory and the concept of total defence. By understanding that the strategic victory of the weaker in an asymmetric conflict is achieved by relying on armed forces, and above all by the synergy of all elements of national power, the conditions are created to get out of conflicts under favourable conditions with as few human and material losses as possible.

*Key words: victory, total defence, defence strategy, grand strategy, conflict, asymmetric conflict*

---

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Defence, Belgrade, Republic of Serbia, danobeograd@gmail.com, ORCID number: 0009-0004-9176-8687

The views expressed in this paper reflect the author's personal view and not that of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Serbia.

## Introduction

The colloquial use of the concept of "victory", which superficially defines the state in which an entity has achieved success in the conflict with the other, as paradoxically as it may sound, can be an obstacle in the scientific and methodological decision-making of researchers to deal with this issue. In order to understand victory, it is necessary to conduct its etymological analysis and explain possible synonyms. In addition to the problem of classification and definition of victory, this paper also theoretically discusses different perception of victory of parties to the conflict at strategic level. In practice, it often happens that wars end without a clear winner, or a seemingly paradoxical situation occurs in which both parties claim to have won. This is explained by broad political perception of victory at strategic level, which does not have to be directly correlated with the success of military operations at tactical and operational level. In order to understand victory in the strategic concept of total defence, it is necessary to conduct a historical and comparative analysis of the comprehension of victory and its relationship to strategy, and defeat, as well. This is to show that victory and defeat at strategic level are not binary, but rather two extreme states involving a number of possible intermediate states. By analysing the content of the current strategic documents of the Republic of Serbia, it has been concluded that the concept of "victory" is not mentioned in them, thus the main question in this paper is how and when small states, like Serbia, which base their security on the concept of total defence, can define victory? The theoretical objective of the research is to define the success of the concept of total defence of small states when they are faced with an attack by a much stronger opponent. The practical objective of this paper is a better understanding of the changes in the paradigm of victory in the defence concept of the Republic of Serbia and further discussion on the need to develop the Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, which would minimise "strategic wandering".

## The comprehension, codification and classification of victory

The term victory is derived from the Latin word *Victoria*, from the verb *vinco, victus*, which means *to conquer*. It is formally translated as "a state in which the enemy has experienced defeat in war or is overpowered in any other form of competition or conflict" (Martel, 2007: 15). In defining victory, the term "success" (*Lat. Successus*) is often used, which means achieving something that has been planned, desired or wanted to be achieved. The word "victory" has a similar meaning in almost all Slavic languages and is primarily related to winning in a fight. Etymologically, it can be related to the permanent struggle of man for survival in difficult conditions. The very term "*win*" means to strike at misery, i.e. to overcome everything that brings misery, misfortune, suffering. At the very beginning, it should be emphasized that victory is not the

antipode of defeat, although these two concepts are very often brought into a cause-and-effect relationship. The term "defeat" comes from the Latin word *Disfacere* – to destroy, to cause serious damage, to lose, which leads to the conclusion that in this context victory could only conditionally be described as "a state in which defeat has been inflicted on the enemy". It could refer to the Old and Middle Ages, when victory was considered the destruction of the enemy's army in a decisive battle, where such losses were inflicted on them that they could not recover in a short period of time. A few centuries later, Clausewitz breaks the existing paradigms about victory in "a decisive battle" because he considers a decisive victory not only a result of the armed force that conquered the battlefield, but believes that for victory it is necessary to "completely destroy the physical and moral strength of the opponent and their complete subjugation to our will with giving up one's intentions". With this definition, Clausewitz, as he consciously introduced and defined the concept of total war, unconsciously defines the concept of "total victory" as only one of the possible outcomes of war (Clausewitz, 1956: 44). In accordance with this attitude, Bartholomees, in an attempt to define victory, primarily asks questions: Who, when and under which conditions can claim to have achieved victory in war and who makes the judgement about who won? After the discussion related to the codification of victory as a state, and not as a fact, Bartholomees remained close to Clausewitz's understanding of victory, bringing it into an inversely proportional relationship with the resistance of the other party. According to the formula, resistance is the product of resources and will that the opponent has ( $\text{Resistance} = \text{Resources} \times \text{Will}$ ). He believes that victory is a state in which resistance is close to zero, which is the essence of the definition of "total victory". In other words, different approaches and problems in defining it confirm Martel's claim that "the word victory is used to imprecisely describe the concept of success in war" (Martel, 2007: 87). Unlike them, Roberts believes that every definition of victory is meaningless, and that politicians, for the sake of their freedom of manoeuvre, very often avoid clearly defining victory and everything that needs to be done to achieve it. He remarks that the victory of one party is not necessarily the defeat of the other party, especially in cases where potential opponents have some common interests (Roberts, 2020: 28). Finally, believing that the problem of defining victory is related to the political character of war, it can be said that *"victory is a subjective assessment of the state political leaders at strategic level, which is not necessarily determined by clear objective indicators at operational and tactical level (human and material losses, occupied territory, etc.)"*. One of very important and complex issues in the discussion about victory is its codification, that is, an attempt to somehow define the criteria before a party declares victory. Perhaps we should take into account the opinion of Colin and Martel when explaining the complexity of the codification of victory, who agree that victory and defeat, although mutually opposite extremes of the situation in a conflict, are not binary, i.e. that between them there is a series of possible intermediate states, which can be defined as "victory" in subjective political paraphrasing (Bartholomees, 2008: 27).

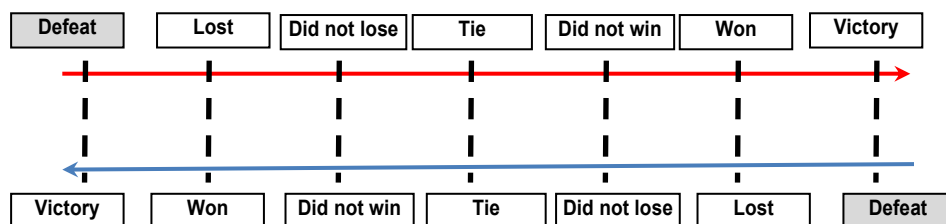


Figure 1 – Different levels of victory and defeat

The main assumption is that the opponents go to war from opposite sides of this so-called "scale of success" with the intention of using their strategies to achieve a favourable outcome of the conflict, i.e. victory. For further theoretical discussion about victory, the question of when one of parties will decide to declare victory, end conflict and how will it be perceived by the other party to conflict is fundamentally important. Ending conflict can be related to the scale of determination, i.e. goals that the warring parties set before starting conflict. Therefore, the goal and possible outcome of war is not only the victory of one party and the implied defeat of the other party, but it is a complex and multifaceted process in which it is even possible, as absurd as it may sound, for both parties to declare victory, being satisfied with the state of the conflict achieved until then. Martel believes that winning war is an assessment of two variables, achievement and determination at tactical, operational and strategic level (Martel, 2007: 27-28). At tactical, and in most cases operational level, victory is related to the clearly visible effects of the armed forces' actions in conflict. At strategic level (and in some parts operational level that directly overlap with strategic level), public perception (national and international) has a great impact on the declaration of victory. In an asymmetric war, the perception of victory is also asymmetric, i.e. for the stronger participant, certain conflict, and therefore victory in it is of operational importance, and for the weaker one, it may be of strategic importance. Ideally, parties to the conflict would be satisfied with their achievements in the conflict, which would create conditions for each party to be satisfied with "its victory", because as Bartholomees says, "they know that the used resources will exceed the political advantage if the conflict continues". This implies that both parties can claim victory, i.e. according to game theory, a *win-win* combination as the outcome of a war. Two other combinations including one party losing and the other winning (*win-lose*, *lose-win*) are also certain, while victory cannot logically be associated with the outcome of *lose-lose* because then there is no winner (which can be the outcome of a nuclear war of great powers - according to the theoretical concept of MAD – Mutual Assured Destruction). In this theoretical reflection on victory, the question should be answered: why is it not possible to win a victory in every war, i.e. what role do politicians play when they set unrealistic or imaginary demands for the armed forces regarding the ultimate desired state that should be reached by the use of force in order to declare victory? Although there are many such examples in the Serbian military history, perhaps the best example is the so-called "war against terrorism", when it was almost impossible to define the military or political state in which victory would be

declared, especially because the warring objectives were constantly changing, which ultimately led to the collapse of the military operation in Afghanistan.

The second question is "how much" of victory is enough for a party to end conflict and declare victory? In explaining the implications of defeat and the relationship of the winner to the defeated, Martel quotes the Latin saying *Vae Victis* – woe to the vanquished (Martel, 2007: 155), which is a clear allusion to the implementation of mostly repressive measures to preserve the absolute or conditional submissiveness of the vanquished. Parties of approximately the same strength can think of "a conditional" victory, while great powers have always sought absolute victory in which they fully fulfill the conflict goals in accordance with national interests and without compromise with the other party. With this paradigm, one can understand Martel's position that "an absolute" victory is very close to the US theory of victory, because it represents a kind of anticipation that comes from the ingrained feeling of the national supremacy of the US over other nations. By analysing the approach to warfare throughout the US history, several clear criteria for victory have been identified: to defeat the enemy's armed forces and their economic infrastructure, the control of the enemy state, political and government reform, economic and infrastructure recovery, the change of the foreign policy of the enemy state and the establishment of new relations with it. This essentially implies a complete redefinition of state interests, goals, strategies and policies for their implementation. In other words, the defeated state becomes a minion of the winner, who dictates the boundaries of the national interests of the vanquished. However, in order for the US victory to be complete, it has to be recognized by other actors, so in addition to the defeated party, confirmation is sought from the very armed forces, the US public and allies. The victory defined in this way essentially includes all Clausewitz's elements of "total war" (people, armed forces and government), which implies that victory (regardless of the strength of the stronger party) cannot be complete until all the mentioned elements of the defeated party accept it as a factual state. The Russian military discourse relates the understanding of victory to the generation of war. In the classification into six generations of war, according to the Russian military thought, the means, levels and goals of war change. Achieving these goals can be characterized as victory in a certain type of conflict (Ostapenko et al., 2012: 92-93). Following the discussion about the complexity of defining and codifying victory, there is a need to classify this complex "state", which is often used colloquially due to its theoretical vagueness. Martel distinguishes four elements of each victory, which makes it possible to carry out closer classification of each victory: the level of victory, the change of status quo, the level of state mobilisation for war (human, material, technological, ideological) and post-conflict obligations (Martel, 2007: 101).

Victory can be classified according to the following criteria:

a) in relation to the type of combat operations (only offensive and defensive military operations are taken into account here as the main types of warfare):

- victory in an attack;
- victory in defence;

- b) in relation to the type of conflict:
  - victory in a symmetric conflict;
  - victory in an asymmetric conflict;
- c) in relation to the level of operations:
  - tactical – related to the destruction of the enemy's armed forces;
  - operational - victory that does not necessarily mean the destruction of their armed forces, because military victory does not mean political victory, as well;
  - strategic victory - reaching the strategic military and political goals of a party to the conflict;
- d) in relation to the level of the destruction of the opponent's capacities for war:
  - total victory - mostly destroyed defence capacities of the opponent;
  - limited victory – partially destroyed defence capacities of the opponent;
- e) in relation to the level of effort of resources:
  - victory without losses - which could conditionally be called "a clean" victory;
  - victory with limited losses and
  - expensive victory - the so-called "Pyrrhic" victory due to greater losses of the winner than the defeated (Vujaklija, 1996: 697);
- f) in relation to duration:
  - time-limited victory;
  - permanent victory - which is measured more by permanent effects after victory and not by a period of time;
- g) in relation to the existence of a formalised act confirming victory:
  - formalised victories and
  - unformalised victories.

Such classification can serve as an adequate basis for a more precise formulation of definitions in defining victory at different levels of generality because every victory, especially at strategic level, is essentially a *Sui generis* political observation.

## The relationship between strategy and victory

Since the theory of victory has not yet been developed, there is no clear correlation between victory and strategy yet. Martel believes that previous theoretical considerations have always suppressed victory as a subcategory of strategy or diplomacy (Martel, 2007: 15-52). Making difference between winning battles and strategic victory as an end state to be reached, preferably without war and destruction, Sun Tzu also argues that the success of every strategy depends on the ability to preserve the victory that is won on the military field. Similar to this view, Thucydides makes a distinction between victory in battles and victory in war, which he claims is "a measure of the change in state in relation to the beginning of the conflict". The Roman General Polybius mentions the "proper use of victory" as the

greatest wisdom, while after him Machiavelli also focused on "persistent victory and maintaining the state after a military victory". Clausewitz says that "there is no victory in strategy", and that tactical victory is a prerequisite for strategic success. Until the 19th century, the success of every strategy was considered to be a decisive and quick victory over the enemy. Analysing the above, it can be concluded that the relationship between strategy and victory is unclear, also because the concept of strategy is generically mentioned without an essential prefix that would define it more closely, i.e. explain which strategy we are talking about. The highest strategic document of the state is its "grand strategy", which unites all elements of power (economic, military, political, information, etc.) in order to achieve strategic goals. The defence strategy is a lower-ranked strategic document that refers to "the preparation and use of military equipment in peace and war, within the state integral defence against all forms of armed threats to national interests and goals". In order to understand victory at strategic level, it is important to notice the correlation between "grand" strategy and military strategy given by Liddell Hart. Namely, he remarked that the goal of the grand strategy was to achieve the political and therefore the military goal of the war, with the fact that the grand strategy does not deal with war in a narrower sense, but includes the course and outcome of war, as well as peace after the war. On the other hand, military strategy (also called pure strategy) represents the skill of a military leader, that is, the skill of distributing military resources in order to achieve political goals. In other words, Hart believes that military strategy is "the implementation of high strategy at a lower level" (Kovač et al., 2009:173). Strategic military victory, which is a derivative of the implementation of military strategy, unequivocally leads to a favourable outcome of the conflict and the probable achievement of national goals in accordance with the grand strategy. However, in the complex and multifaceted dynamics of the conflict, the military *status quo* or denying a quick victory to a potentially stronger opponent can create preconditions for the engagement of other elements of the state power in order to achieve a favourable outcome of conflicts through negotiations. This is essential to open a theoretical debate on whether even small states can define victory, not as the destruction of the military force of a disproportionately greater attacker but, as Taiwan's former Chief of General Staff Lee His-ming believes, as deterring or preventing the enemy from winning the victory according to their idea (His-ming, 2020).

## The concept of victory in the strategic concept of total defence of the Republic of Serbia

In order to explain and understand the historical concept of the Serbian comprehension of victory, the wider theoretical concept of strategic culture has to be understood. We should start from Martin Van Creveld's position that "different cultures consider war differently" (Van Creveld, 1991). Similar to him, Huser claims

that a different view of war implies a different perception of victory, and he expands his claim with the fact that there are different material, social and cultural variables in the understanding of war (Huser, 2010: 20). On the basis of different cultural understanding of war, Husser classifies cultures into "passive" and "active". According to him, "passive culture" leads to passive strategic thinking that shapes their strategy. "Active culture" that leads to changes is opposite it, where war is only one of the ways to achieve it. Here the author obviously views pejoratively cultures whose war ethos is based on defence, while at the same time glorifying the so-called "active", but essentially aggressive cultures, which allegedly lead to changes. This type of classification is very questionable, because the orientation of some culture not to consider war as a way to initiate positive changes or to impose its values on others by force does not make that culture less valuable. Accordingly, the classification into "offensive" and "defensive" cultures would be more acceptable. It is undeniable that the geopolitical position of a country, historical traumas and heritage, religion, sense of belonging and patriotism, value system and a great number of other factors shape the so-called "strategic culture" of the people. In this context, Vračar and Stanojević believe that "each country, encouraged by the impacts of its cultural identity, has a unique way of analysis, interpretation and reaction to international reality." (Vračar et al., 2019: 295-315). Stepić believes that geopolitical factors are the basis of the Serbian strategic culture, thus from this aspect it should be understood that the Serbian war ethos and logos were primarily formed in the fight for the liberation and preservation of the Serbian statehood in complex geopolitical circumstances from the 19th century to the present day (Stepić, 2019: 166 -180). The long-term pressures of the "preferred" foreign policy course of the Republic of Serbia, permanent, mostly dichotomous, internal divisions around vital national interests that were almost impossible to reconcile with diametrically opposite interests of great powers, forced the Republic of Serbia to be in a state of permanent political and military defence. Before the Balkan wars and the First World War, General Putnik and Colonel Mišić developed the War Plan of Serbia, whose main idea was to stick to the defence until the political and strategic situation was clarified, and then act according to the situation (Group of authors, 1924). Even after the First World War, in the countries including Serbia, the strategic paradigm of the state defence also dominated. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia entered the April War in 1941 by engaging its forces according to the R-41 war plan, which was essentially of a defensive character. After the Second World War, the Defence Strategy of the SFRY was based on the defensive concept of public defence and social self-defence. It implied that the Armed Forces of the SFRY (Yugoslav People's Army and Territorial Defence since 1968) should be the leaders of resistance to a potential aggressor and protect independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and the socialist system of the SFRY established by the SFRY Constitution (Constitution of the SFRY, 1974). Finally, common to all these eras is the perception that successful defence is synonymous with victory, especially if a



country is attacked by a disproportionately stronger aggressor. The historically complex geopolitical environment and internal political turmoil have caused the national (and thus defence) interests of the Republic of Serbia to change in accordance with the periodic dominance of strategic culture that is more oriented towards pro-Western or pro-Russian political discourse. Analysing the state of strategic culture in the Republic of Serbia, Vračar and Stanojević believe that the chosen policy of military neutrality has the potential to provide Serbia with a foreign policy balance in relations with great powers, and also an internal political consensus between two clearly profiled forms of strategic culture in the country (Vračar et al., 2019: 295-315). Military neutrality implies exclusively relying on one's own resources, i.e. self-assistance in case of conflict, which led the Republic of Serbia to accept the strategic concept of total defence as a model for the development of its defence system (Stojković, 2019). Developing the concept of total defence in the Republic of Serbia, the National Security Strategy, the Defence Strategy and the Doctrine of the Serbian Armed Forces have been developed so far (Forca et al., 2014: 145-165). An analysis of the content of these documents has shown that none of them contains the term "victory", while the Doctrine of the Serbian Armed Forces Operations is the highest doctrinal document in which it is stated that "victory is the ultimate goal of engaging the army in the event of an escalation of the conflict", without any further explanation (Doctrine of the SAF Operations, 2010). Although victory as a concept is not mentioned in the Defence Strategy, based on the emphasis on defence and the protection of national interests, it could be concluded that, from the aspect of this document, victory at strategic level in a potential conflict is in fact successfully executed defence.

## The perception of a strategic victory in the defence of small states

In order to test the claims made earlier regarding how small states can win a strategic victory in a conflict with a multiple superior enemy, we will use a multiple case study, that is, we will conduct a comparative analysis of the success of the US military engagement 20 years after the aggression against the FRY, Iraq and Afghanistan, as the examples of the military operations where disproportionately great military force was used against states that were defending themselves. The criteria of the US victory defined by Martel (Martel, 2007:104) have been used as indicators, and they have been assessed using the three-level Seti scale. According to this scale, *success* is complete achievement or great positive progress in fulfilling the set criterion, *partial success* is considered to be circumstances in which certain progress has been achieved, but it is not clear whether it is possible to achieve complete success of the given criterion, while *failure* is the situation when the set criterion has not been reached or was not viable without the presence of strong occupying forces.

Table 1 – A comparative analysis of the success of the US military engagement in KiM, Iraq and Afghanistan

Criteria for the US strategic victory	KiM (R. Serbia)	Afghanistan	Iraq
Defeat the enemy's armed forces and their economic infrastructure	<i>The army is not defeated, but the economic infrastructure is greatly damaged.</i> – <b>Partial success</b>	<i>At the beginning of the war, the initiative was on the US party. After 20 years of war, the Taliban gained supremacy in the territory of the country.</i> – <b>Failure</b>	<i>The army is defeated and the economic infrastructure is destroyed.</i> – <b>Success</b>
Control of the enemy state	<i>The NATO Forces control the Republic of Kosovo and the majority of member states support the unilateral declaration of independence of the Republic of Kosovo without formal recognition by the Republic of Serbia and the UN.</i> – <b>Partial success</b>	<i>Since the beginning of the war, control has been established only over greater demographic centres and along important roads. In the end, control over the territory has been completely lost.</i> – <b>Failure</b>	<i>Since the beginning of the war, control has been established only over greater demographic centres and along important roads. At the end of the conflict, a great part of the territory is under the control of ISIL and pro-Iranian militias.</i> – <b>Partial success</b>
Political and government reform	<i>In 2001, there was a change of government in Serbia, while the so-called Republic of Kosovo was established in KiM. The crisis in relations between Belgrade and Pristina is the subject of negotiations under the auspices of the EU and the support of the US.</i> – <b>Partial success</b>	<i>All the Pro-American institutions of government that were established in Afghanistan disappeared after the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021.</i> – <b>Failure</b>	<i>Institutions are formed through elections and have a generally good relationship with the US, but are burdened by the influence of local security factors.</i> – <b>Success</b>
Economy and infrastructure restoration	<i>Investment in economy and infrastructure.</i> – <b>Partial success</b>	<i>All investment has been called into question after the military defeat. Afghanistan still remains an under-developed country.</i> – <b>Failure</b>	<i>Considerable funds have been invested in the reconstruction of the energy infrastructure for the exploitation of oil as the primary source of the state financing.</i> – <b>Partial success</b>

Criteria for the US strategic victory	KiM (R. Serbia)	Afghanistan	Iraq
Change of the foreign policy of the enemy state	<i>Through its foreign policy, R. Serbia is trying to establish good relations with the US, which are burdened by the unresolved status of KiM – Failure. The so-called Kosovo unquestioningly follows the US policy. – Success. Conclusion according to this indicator – Partial success</i>	<i>The foreign policy of the Afghan government after the US occupation was in accordance with the US interests, but it experienced a fiasco after the Taliban came to power. – Failure</i>	<i>Iraq's policy towards the US is generally friendly, but it is uncertain in which direction it will develop due to the strengthening of regional influences. – Success</i>
Establishment of new relations with the enemy state	<i>Both parties would like to improve relations, but they are burdened by unresolved issues related to KiM and different perceptions of the conflict during the wars in the territory of the former SFRY. – Success</i>	<i>Good relations have been developed with the puppet government in Afghanistan. After the arrival of the Taliban, there was a fundamental change. It is not clear in which direction this cooperation will develop. – Failure</i>	<i>The relations between the two countries have substantially improved in comparison to the period before the beginning of the war. – Success</i>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b><i>A quasi-strategic victory for the US, as described by Martel, with an unclear end result. (Martel W., 2007) An attempt to create a heteronomous quasi-state that follows the US policy.</i></b>	<b><i>A strategic defeat for the US, despite a series of tactical and operational military victories. The attempt to establish states and nations through the action of an external factor according to the Western cultural and legislative pattern has failed.</i></b>	<b><i>A quasi-strategic victory for the US with an unclear outcome according to many parameters of the victory.</i></b>

Analysing these three cases, it can be concluded that even small states, with their formalised or non-formalised defence strategies in which the essence is resistance and non-acceptance of defeat, can cause serious damage to the aggressor and their strategic goals. Such an action, especially over a longer period, exhausts the aggressor and leaves them without a quick victory, which in the end may imply that they abandon their initial strategic goals.

## *Conclusion*

Victory as a state can be codified and clearly described at tactical and operational level, while its definition at strategic level is difficult because victory can be used to describe any state during the conflict that politicians assess to meet the minimum protection of national interests. This is particularly related to the attempt to define the victory of the parties to an asymmetric conflict. The historical and comparative analysis has shown that since the restoration of its modern statehood in the 19th century, the Republic of Serbia has developed and maintained the defence concept in various forms, whose focus was on the territorial defence, and that, following its strategic and essentially defensive culture, that concept is still present today. However, this does not mean that small states, relying on their resources, cannot deny a disproportionately greater opponent a quick victory, fast destruction of defence forces and the establishment of an occupation system of government. A state in which the adversary slows down, loses initiative and political support in their country, and at the same time engages greater human and material resources than they have initially planned, can lead to an outcome that leads to the preservation of the Serbian interests. This state of affairs can be perceived as a victory at strategic level. The case study has confirmed that the concept of total defence, even in conditions when it is not formally codified, and is a part of the strategic culture of the people (example of Afghanistan), gives results if small states are forced to a strategy of confrontation with great powers. Finally, sound strategic reflection dictates that the state adapts more quickly to changes in the strategic environment, reduces strategic wandering, and that national interests have to be clearly defined at the state level within the Strategy of the Republic of Serbia. On its basis, all lower-ranking strategies and policies aimed at solving the problem would be directed before we come to the situation where the only guarantor of the protection of national interests is the Armed Forces of the Republic of Serbia.

## *Literature*

### *Books*

- [1] Bartholomees, B. (2008). *Theory of Victory. Parameters.*
- [2] Colin S, G. (2002). *Defining and Achieving Decisive Victory.* US Army War College.
- [3] Huser, B. (2010). *The Evolution of Strategy, Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present.* Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Klauzevic, K. (1956). *O ratu.* Grafičko preduzeće Vuk Karadžić.
- [5] Kovač. M., Stojković, D., (2009). *Strategijsko planiranje odbrane.* Vojnoizdavački zavod.
- [6] Martel, W. (2007). *Victory in War.* Cambridge Univeristy Press.
- [7] Ostapenko, O., Baushev, S., Morozov, I. (2012). *Информационно-Космическое Обеспечение Группировок Войск (Сил) ВС РФ.* Любавич.

[8] Roberts, B. (2020). On Theories of Victory, Red and Blue. Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

[9] Sun Cu, V. (2020). Umeće ratovanja. Izdavačko preduzeće Babun.

[10] Van Creveld, M. (1991). The transformation of war. Free Press.

[11] Vujaklija, M. (1996). Leksikon stranih reči i izraza – jubilarno izdanje. Prosveta.

[12] Mišić, Ž. (1990). Moje uspomene. BIGZ.

[13] Đorđević, B. (2000). Istorija srpske ratne veštine. Vojnoizdavački zavod.

[14] Grupa autora, (1924). Veliki rat Srbije za oslobođenje i ujedinjenje Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca, knjiga I.

### *Journals*

[15] Vračar, M., Stanojević, G. (2019). Strateška kultura Srbije i koncept totalne odbrane. Vojno delo, 8/2019, 294-315.

[16] Stepić, M. (2019). Geopolitički temelji srpske strateške kulture. Vojno delo, 8/2019, 166-180.

[17] Forca, B., Stojković, D., (2014). O hijerarhiji strategijskih dokumenata. Vojno delo, leto 2014, 145-165.

### *Internet*

[18] Ksi Ming, L. (2020). Taiwan's Overall Defense Concept, Explained. The Diplomat. Преузето дана 15.04.2022. године са <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/taiwans-overall-defense-concept-explained/>

[19] Stojković, D. (2019). Koncept totalne odbrane u savremenim uslovima – 64. Sajam knjiga u Beogradu. Преузето дана 03.02.2022. са <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtNZpDuxcgw>

### *Other*

[20] Стратегија националне безбедности Републике Србије, 2020.

[21] Стратегија одбране Републике Србије, 2009.

[22] Доктрина Војске Србије, 2010.

[23] Устав СФРЈ, 1974, Службени гласник.

## *S u m m a r y*

**T**he discussion about victory at strategic level is burdened by the colloquial interpretation of the term itself and the complex interpretation of the relationship between victory and strategy throughout history. In addition to the problem of classification and definition of victory, this paper also theoretically discusses different perception of victory by the parties to the conflict at strategic level, which indicates the complexity of the relationship between victory and strategy. Victory at strategic level is a political qualification that may or may not result from military victories at operational and tactical level. The main criterion for claiming

victory at strategic level is to consider the level of achievement of the prescribed goals of the war, which are related to the achievement or defence of the state national interests. The paper has shown that victory and defeat at strategic level are not binary, but rather two extreme states between which there is a number of possible intermediate states. Small states can claim their victory in one of the intermediate states if the current state guarantees the protection of their essential and vital national interests. Furthermore, those who base their defence strategy on the concept of total defence, even if they do not defeat a stronger opponent militarily, and if during an armed conflict they deny the enemy an absolute victory according to their criteria, and at the same time protect their national interests, they can consider such an outcome victory. The concept of total defence can lead to a conditional victory when it is supported by the statehood and libertarian strategic culture of the people. By analysing the content of strategic and doctrinal documents, scientific publications, and then by comparative and historical analysis of the concepts of strategy and victory, their relationship and understanding in different historical eras has been shown. The historical comprehension of victory in the Republic of Serbia since the restoration of statehood in the 19th century until today has been particularly analysed. A multiple study (R. Serbia 1999–2022; Afghanistan 2001–2021; Iraq 2003–2022) in which the defenders' successes were analysed after the attack by an asymmetrically stronger armed force led by the US Armed Forces, has served as the basis for scientific generalisation and making a final statement about the success of the total defence, and also a conditional victory that can be declared by the party that has successfully defended itself. In order to understand the meaning of victory in the concept of total defence of the Republic of Serbia, it is necessary to understand the strategic culture of our people, i.e. the factors that have historically shaped the Serbian geostrategic code, especially from the restoration of the modern Serbian state in the 19th century until today. It should be said that victory is not mentioned in the current strategic documents of the Republic of Serbia, thus the main question in this paper is how and when small states that base their security on the concept of total defence can define victory? It has been shown that the answer to this question is the so-called asymmetric victory. Namely, it should be understood that *the strategic victory of the weaker in an asymmetric conflict is achieved by relying on armed forces, and above all, by the synergy of all elements of national power the conditions are created to get out of conflicts under favourable conditions with as few human and material losses as possible*. Therefore, the goal and possible outcome of war is not only the victory of one party and the implied defeat of the other party, but it is a complex and multifaceted process in which it is even possible, as absurd as it may sound, for both parties to claim victory, being satisfied with the state that has been reached. In an asymmetric war, the perception of victory is also asymmetric, i.e. for a stronger participant, some conflict, and therefore victory in it, is of operational importance, and for a weaker one, it may be of strategic importance. In the complex and multifaceted dynamics of the conflict, the military status quo or denying a quick victory to a potentially stronger opponent can

create preconditions for the engagement of other elements of the state power in order to achieve a favourable outcome of the conflict. It is also of fundamental importance, so that it could be argued that even small states can define victory not as the destruction of the military force of a disproportionately greater attacker, but as deterring or preventing the enemy from winning the victory according to their idea.

*Key words: victory, total defence, defence strategy, grand strategy, conflict, asymmetric conflict*

© 2023 The Authors. Published by *Vojno delo* (<http://www.vojnodelo.mod.gov.rs>).

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

