



War is a pendulum swinging back and forth between victory and defeat, writes Joseph E Fallon. Its momentum is maintained by the gravity of human nature and human passions, maintained not just by emotions, but by blind arrogance and a blinder illusion.

However, by learning from the past you can better understand the present, and, thereby, better prepare for the future. This article signposts a few of them

"Lessons Learned" is a military program created for that purpose. It is to study and learn from the failures in past wars to ensure victory in future wars. It was established by the U.S. Army in 1985 with the Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL) and NATO in 2002 with the Joint Analysis and Lessons Learned Centre (JALLC).

Unfortunately, lessons were not learned. The United States still has not won a war since 1945. NATO post-Cold War missions repeatedly failed to achieve either a military victory (Afghanistan, Libya) or establish a lasting peace (Bosnia, Kosovo).

Experts in Washington and Brussels may read von Clausewitz's *Vom Kriege* on the theory and practice of war, but they are unable to answer his implied questions.

"War is merely the continuation of policy by other means."

What is the policy? Containment? Regime change? Nation-building? State-building? Maintain a unipolar world order? How is it to be done? What is the objective? Short-term? Long-term? Most importantly, Why? Why this war? Why this enemy? Why at this time?

"War is an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will."

How? To become a vassal state? To surrender territory? To make reparations? To have Western corporations expropriate and exploit the natural resources of the enemy country as proposed by Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski?

"To secure that object we must render the enemy powerless."

How? Sanctions? They have failed in Belarus, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Venezuela, and Yemen. Occupation? How is that to be financed? How is it to be supplied? For how long?

The Soviets occupied Afghanistan for 10 years but could not defeat the Mujahidin guerrilla forces and were forced to leave. The cost of the war helped to bankrupt the Soviet Union, politically as well as economically.

The U.S. military destroyed the Taliban as a conventional army and successfully occupied Afghanistan for 20 years -- only to lose to Taliban guerrilla forces. The war was bleeding the U.S. economy.

In his address to the nation, August 31, 2021, President Biden stated: "We no longer had a clear purpose in an open-ended mission in Afghanistan. After more than \$2 trillion spent in Afghanistan, costs that Brown University researchers estimated would be over \$300 million a day for 20 years in Afghanistan -- for two decades -- yes, the American people should hear this: \$300 million a day for two decades... And what have we lost as a consequence, in terms of opportunities? I refused to continue in a war that was no longer in the service of the vital national interest of our people."

According to Brown University's Cost of War Project: "The war has been long and complex and horrific and unsuccessful...The Pentagon and the U.S. military have now absorbed the great majority of the federal discretionary budget, and most people don't know that ...'What have we truly accomplished in 20 years of post-9/11 wars and at what price?' said Stephanie Savell, co-director of the Costs of War Project and a senior research associate at the Watson Institute. 'Twenty years from now, we'll still be reckoning with the high societal costs of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars -- long after U.S. forces are gone.'"

"War does not consist of a single short blow."

One definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different result. For 60 years, the tactic of "Shock and Awe", a single short blow of overwhelming power to force an enemy to capitulate, has been repeatedly employed and has repeatedly failed. It failed in Vietnam. It failed in Yugoslavia. It failed in Iraq. It failed in Afghanistan. It failed in Libya. Yet, it is still used. It is a lesson never learned. "In war the result is never final."

The West's victory in the Cold War resulted in a form of Carthaginian peace. The enemy state, itself, was abolished. Soviet Union. Yugoslavia.

The West forgets "revenge is a dish best served cold." After three wars spanning more than a century (264--241 BC, 218--201 BC, and 149--146 BC), Rome destroyed

Carthage. But "the result is never final." More than half a millennium later, there was a fourth "Punic" war. By 439 AD, the Germanic tribe, the Vandals, had conquered Roman North Africa and established Carthage as capital of their empire. Its border closely coincided to that of the extinguished Carthaginian Empire. They then seized Rome's Mediterranean possessions of Corsica, Mallorca, Sardinia, and Sicily. Finally, in 455 AD, they entered Rome itself. The new Carthaginians invaded and looted the once imperial city. It was a coup de main. Rome continued on for only 21 years under puppets or pretenders. In the "Punic" Wars, the eventual victor was "Carthage."

When studying history, experts on warfare should remember this warning of Clausewitz that "In war the result is never final." And keep in mind that History has a sense of irony. The wars of the 20 th and 21 st Centuries have undermined the concept of linear history.

"The End of History" is false. The past is no longer prologue. The future repeats the mistakes of the past in an endless loop.

Modern warfare has become a vicious cycle where "the result is never final." Hot War is followed by Cold War is followed by another Hot War. Victory and defeat are ephemeral. Often interchangeable. The following small sample provides an illustration.

Afghanistan, 1979-1989, 2001-2021.

Balkans, 1912-1913, 1914-1918, 1941-1945, 1991-2001, 2008, 2023.

Gaza, 1947, 1956, 1967, 1987-1993, 2001-2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021, 2023-present.

Iraq, 1980-1988, 1991, 2003-2011,

Ukraine, 1917-1921, 1940-1945, 2022-present

Universities, think tanks, and war colleges have issued voluminous studies, papers, and reports on wars and warfare. They have offered copious critiques and analyses of wars, in theory and practice. But do they know what constitutes a victory?

Victory in war is not achieved by defeating the enemy through superior military force.

Victory is achieved when the war has realized the policy for which it had been fought.

And which could not have been attained through other means. War is only a tool, never an objective.

This is a lesson that modern Europe learned only once in the Treaty of Paris, 1814-1815, which ended the Napoleonic Wars and the reign of Napoleon. The policy was to restore the European political order to what it had been before the French Revolution of 1789. The Congress of Vienna sought to achieve this through diplomacy and consensus, not with a vindictive peace treaty. It was successful and realized a peace that lasted one hundred years.

The Allies in World War I, World War II, and the Cold War repeatedly lacked this wisdom, which has brought forth the current crises in Europe.

Too many critiques and analyses of war by universities, think tanks, and war colleges are fixated on the belief advanced military technology, in particular AI and drones, will ensure "victory" because such technology provides, at low cost, "the capacity to conduct virtually risk-free attacks with decisive lethal force."

With drone warfare marketed as war with "no boots on the ground" such warfare becomes a tempting option in times of crises. Furthermore, it seduces politicians into believing they now possess the means for a "do-over" -- to re-fight past lost wars ensuring this time they will win.

But History suggests otherwise. The advanced military technology of the United States was defeated by guerrilla armies. The United States was on the receiving end of "Shock and Awe." First in Vietnam, then nearly half a century later in Afghanistan. Immortalized in remarkably similar photographs of a U.S. military helicopter evacuating U.S. personnel. Saigon, April 30, 1975. Kabul, August 16, 2021.

The very definition of war has become illusive; reduced to an academic battle as to its nature, character, and scope. When neither war, nor the purpose of war can be defined satisfactorily by the power waging it (i.e., the United States in Vietnam and Afghanistan), how can that power determine what is "victory?" And when it has been achieved?

As Simone de Beauvoir, French author and activist, lamented: "If you live long enough, you'll see that every victory turns into a defeat."

But war is a pendulum and every defeat can also turn into a victory.

The United States lost the first Cold War, 1945-1980, to the Soviet Union. By 1980, the United States had been unable to prevent Soviet suppression of revolts in East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. It had been militarily defeated in Indo-China. Its anti-Soviet military alliances CENTO and SEATO had collapsed. Soviet-backed India had defeated U.S.-backed Pakistan. The Soviet Union had checkmated the United States in Southeast and South Asia. When the Shah of Iran fell from power, so did U.S. power and influence in the Middle East. To such a degree, when a self-styled Mahdi and 600 of his armed disciples seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia turned to France for help. The United States had lost its proxy wars in Africa to pro-Soviet forces in Ethiopia, Angola, and Mozambique. In Central America, pro-Soviet forces had seized power in Nicaragua and threatened U.S. supported governments in El Salvador and Guatemala. Globally, U.S. power had been rolled-back. The United States isolated.

However, the United States won the second Cold War, 1980-1991. The Berlin Wall fell. Germany was reunified. The Warsaw Pact was disbanded. The Soviet Union collapsed. In the post-Cold War world, the United States had emerged as a hyperpower, a power without rival, in a unipolar world, which critics labeled "American hegemony." To maintain unipolarity, the United States sponsored regime change often marketed as color coded revolutions -- Rose, Orange, Tulip. These succeeded in Georgia in 2003, in Ukraine in 2004, in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, and in Ukraine, again, in 2014.

But the United States had overextended itself financially, militarily, and politically. First, its attempt at regime change failed in Belarus in 2006 (Jeans Revolution), in Russia in 2011 (Snow Revolution), and Belarus, again, in 2020 (Slipper Revolution).

Then in 2021 the United States suffered "blowback" -- the unintended, harmful fallout from its actions. In seeking to preserve unipolarity, it engaged in a 20-year war in Afghanistan against guerrillas carrying AK-47s and driving pick-up trucks -- and lost. The unipolar world began to unravel. This was a victory for Russia, the successor state to the Soviet Union. The pendulum was, once again, in motion. Hot War/Cold War 3.0 began in Afghanistan with an American defeat and continued in Ukraine with a possible Russian victory. War is to achieve a desired policy, a political objective. The United States did not. Russia just might.