Triumph and Tragedy

The Victory of Just War

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I. Introduction

1. Victory?
2. Just War?
3. The Victory of Just War
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“What constitutes victory? I think that is a fundamental question, and it is good for each of us in this country to ask ourselves that from time to time. When we try to decide whether or not we’ve been victorious, we have to think, for just a second, what the term ‘victory’ means.”

Gen. Tommy Franks
Romans Passing Under the Yoke (detail), Charles Gleyre, 1858, and an illustration of a subjugation ritual
“We win.”

Still no feeling of euphoria. I think I know why it is. … It hasn’t been a clean end—there is no battleship Missouri surrender. That’s what’s missing to make this akin to WWII, to separate Kuwait from Korea and Vietnam.

Pres. G. H. W. Bush,
28th February, 1991
“Success was a matter of perspective. In Iraq it had to be. There was no Omaha Beach, no Vicksburg Campaign, not even an Alamo to signal a clear defeat. The closest we’d come were those toppled Saddam statues, but that was years ago.”

Phil Klay.
**Winning the War on Terror?**

• “We lack a metrics to know if we are winning or losing the Global War on Terror.” *Donald Rumsfeld.*

• It’s hard to know if we are winning the War on Terror, because “this is not the sort of struggle where you take a hill, plant the flag, and go home with a victory parade.” *Gen. David Petraeus.*

• Leaders “do not have the foggiest notion of what victory would look like, how it would be won, and what it might cost.” *Andrew Bacevich.*
• I am uneasy “about using the word ‘victory’, because, you know, it invokes this notion of Emperor Hirohito coming down and signing a surrender to Macarthur.” Pres. Barack Obama.
Is victory appropriate?

• “To aim at winning a war, to take victory as your object, is no more than a state of lunacy.” B. Liddel Hart

• “In war there is no victory, only varying degrees of defeat.” Kenneth Waltz

• “In modern war there is no victor. Defeat reaches out its heavy hand to uttermost corners of the earth, and lays its burdens on victor and vanquished alike.” Aristide Briand
Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing.

• “War’s very object is victory … In war there is no substitute for victory.” Gen. Douglas MacArthur
• “The telos of medical art is health, that of shipbuilding a vessel, that of military strategy victory.” Aristotle.
• “When we commit our troops to battle we must do so with the sole object of winning.” Caspar Weinberger
• “You ask what is our aim? I can answer in one word: victory—victory at all costs, victory however long and hard the road may be.” P.M. Winston Churchill
II. The Just War Tradition
III. The Victory of Just War

• *Jus Post Bellum* and the ethics of victory
• What are the responsibilities of the victor after war?
• But doesn’t this suppose a clean victory?
• And what is victory anyway?
Looking beyond the *Jus Post Bellum* ...

• “There must be purposes that are worth dying for, outcomes for which soldiers’ lives are not too high a price. The idea of a just war requires the same assumption. A just war is one that is morally urgent to win, and a soldier who dies in a just war does not die in vain.” *Michael Walzer*

• “If it is morally necessary to go to war, it is morally obligatory to win. One has no business going to war except to win.” *James G. Murphy, SJ*

• “For war kills, and a war which has no chance of successfully pursuing its just cause is one where the deaths which it occasions seem utterly pointless—which makes it an unjust war.” *Cecile Fabre*

Victory is essential to just war …
… but also in tension with it.

•“In competitive games, I loved the pride of winning.”
•Military victories are not “the solid joys of the fortunate”, but the “vain comforts of miserable men”. They are “no more than beguiling temptations to seek only one beguiling temptation after another.”
IV. Triumph & Tragedy

• How is victory posited in just war thinking?
• How, in other words, have the ideals of victory and just war variously informed, intersected, and cut across one another over time?
• Historical approach
How we as scholars conceptualize victory reveals certain oddities in respect of how we think about just war. In particular, how scholars conceive of victory in relation to just war suggests that their view of the latter rests upon, even perpetuates, a deeply anachronistic understanding of warfare itself—one that is rooted in outmoded notions that war is an *agonal* endeavour akin to an ordeal or trial by combat.
Thank you very much for your time.

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Details of the broader project are available at:

http://moralvictories.gla.a
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