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**NOTION OF VICTORY IN 21ST CENTURY WARS
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**ORGANISED BY CENJOWS
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ORGANISED BY CENJOWS ON 26 JUNE 2025

The “notion of victory” in war has traditionally revolved around tangible outcomes, capturing territory, compelling surrender, or inflicting decisive destruction. However, in the context of today’s multi-domain battlespaces, where frontlines are blurred and grey-zone tactics prevail, this classical definition is rapidly becoming obsolete. Victory is no longer a fixed end state; it is a fluid concept shaped as much by perception and narrative as by kinetic achievements.

Modern conflicts unfold without formal declarations and often conclude without definitive treaties. This lack of clear closure creates a “crisis of certainty,” leaving military institutions and political leadership grappling with ambiguity, unsure whether they have triumphed, lost, or merely survived. Yet, this uncertainty is not a weakness but a defining characteristic of contemporary warfare that demands adaptation and evolution.

In today's battles, the cognitive domain is as critical as the kinetic and non-kinetic ones. Influence operations, information dominance, narrative control, and sustaining national will are as consequential as physical engagements. Success hinges on a balanced application of all instruments of power, where shaping opinion, denying adversarial space, and sustaining public resolve are integral to favourable outcomes.

Historical and ongoing conflicts, from India’s 1971 campaign and the Kargil War to Galwan and the war in Ukraine highlights how the definition of victory shifts with context. In some scenarios, mere survival equates to success; in others, preventing the adversary from achieving strategic objectives, even at the cost of tactical concessions, constitutes a win.

Operation Sindoor, a conceptual Indian response to a terror provocation, illustrates this recalibrated understanding of success. Rather than the escalation, the response focuses on restoring deterrence, asserting technological and psychological edge, and reinforcing strategic autonomy. In contrast, Pakistan’s objectives often rest in sustaining its proxy infrastructure or distorting global narratives, highlighting a fundamental asymmetry in strategic goals that must be clearly understood and addressed.

The path forward calls for doctrinal recalibration, integration of cyber and space warfare, reform in defence planning and capability development, and leadership equipped to operate in ambiguity. A comprehensive national defence reset, anchored in clarity of purpose and

seamless coordination across military, political, economic, and informational domains—is essential.

In this evolving landscape, strategic success is no longer gauged by hectares gained but by the futures secured, perceptions influenced, and deterrence upheld. Victory becomes a continuum, driven by agility, innovation, and narrative control, where the power to shape the story is as decisive as the ability to fight the battle.