

[January 2020 Handgrenade](#)

Blog Post published by John T Kuehn on Friday, January 3, 2020
January 2020

Handgrenade of the Month

The Fleeting Nature of Victory: the Case of Iraq

By John T. Kuehn

In another forum I characterized the American experience in Iraq from 2003 - 2014 as a military disaster. I chose a later date to include the fall of Mosul to ISIS, which belied the lasting stability and success the US believed it had achieved in Iraq after 2011's withdrawal.

Of course, someone writing of that experience in 2011 might've characterized the US experience as a success, a victory, a qualified one, but a victory (however undeserved) nonetheless. In response someone else asked me for my definition of victory, and I responded that I was far more interested in the characteristics of military disaster and failure. The question itself highlights the Colin Gray view of the American way of war, our obsession with victory, when it is the amelioration of failure that is perhaps a more achievable outcome, or the amelioration of mistakes and missteps.

In thinking a bit more about this issue, it occurred to me that we look differently at the so called successes (and failures) in war gone by over time. Not a unique view, but one worth considering. The sheen often fades from once glorious victories (Desert Storm, or the First Gulf War, for example) and sometimes the cup of defeat is not so empty and bitter after all (the defeat of Egypt in 1973 for example).

My challenge to the Handgrenade readership then is this, can you think of other cases of victories that over time have appeared less and less "victorious"?

Bon Annee.

Posted in:

[Hand Grenade of the Week](#)