

The Warrior, Military Ethics and Contemporary Warfare: Achilles goes Asymmetrical, by Pauline M. Karin, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014, pp. 154, £60.00

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The process of 'War', whether waged for noble or ignoble ends and for long considered a valid instrument of state policy, is broadly interpreted along the Clausewitzian dictum of the 'application of organised violence for political ends'. The United Nations (UN) outlaws the proposition that states can use force for resolving their disputes. However, given the continuous and pervasive nature of international violence, newer and more acceptable (as also anodyne) terms like 'armed conflict', 'use of force', 'military combat', 'recourse to arms', besides many more, have found their way into modern lexicon. In likewise manner, the human instrument that engages in this process at the professional level is now known as the 'soldier', as against the earlier typology of a 'warrior'. Within this changing mix, the terminology for primordial mechanics, means or the methodology remains unchanged and continues to be called 'warfare'.

Further, the post-Cold War era has seen a marked decline in inter-state or international conflicts, whereas those with internal causations have grown in their numbers, levels of violence, duration, means employed and more often than not, there has been the involvement of non-state actors. The process of warfare in such conflicts has come to be variously defined as asymmetric, irregular, compound and fourth generation warfare

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(4GW). In most cases, the participants in this process, at least from one side if not both, are the personnel that do not fit the exact definition of a ‘combatant’.

For the purpose of this book, the author has adopted the umbrella framework of asymmetric warfare (AW) as the one undergirding the use of conventional militaries for non-conventional military operations, especially in light of recent experiences (Iraq and Afghanistan). The crux of the book is an attempt to find the transmutation between ‘professional conduct’ as governed by the laid down rules/regulations (ethics) of a ‘soldier’ and the philosophical (self-conceptualised and moral) dimension of a ‘warrior’. The author exemplifies this conundrum by using the celebrated Western classic, *Iliad*. While Hector comes across as a more complete ‘warrior’, Achilles is assessed to be a superior ‘soldier’ (p. 2).

This subconscious ‘duality and dilemma’ between the morality and ethics in the military, be it sailors, soldiers, airmen or marines, becomes more prominent when they are employed in violent non-international armed conflict situations. This paradox, and inherent complexities as to the legality and validity at the larger politic-strategic level, has been questioned through the *jus ad bellum* lens (most recently, Iraq and Libya). However, its treatment through the *jus in bello* (mechanistic–functional level) is a void that the author has attempted to fill through this work. The book comprises nine analytical chapters, in addition to the stage setting and conclusion sections.

The first two chapters deal with the intangible but crucial aspects of courage and loyalty that also form important virtues of military honour. The author proposes that the conventional definition of ‘courage’ by responding ‘in kind’ to the utmost against the enemy (giving it back as hard as one gets) may require a subtle but important recast (pp. 15–21). Courage in AW requires more than normal attention to ‘restraint’ and ‘selectivity’. While this has much to do with the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) principles of ‘legality and proportionality’, it is the larger question of ‘what’ is intended to be achieved at the grand strategic level which assumes greater importance. While military means fulfil an important part of the whole dynamics in AW, they are not the ‘only dimension’, and coexist with politics, societal, cultural and human factors. In a similar vein, loyalty that is closely bound to courage requires a delicate rephrasing. In the words of the author, loyalty is made up of several factors like obedience, trust and cohesion (pp. 31–33). The dilemma facing a regular soldier is the moral asymmetry (Moral Equation

of the Combatants [MEC]), where the opponent is able to use foul means without sanction, while he/she is bound by ethical and moral codes. However, AW operations require a different sense of loyalty, where it transcends the narrow 'clan' characteristics and needs to be seen through an extended ambit of universally accepted norms of humane and just behaviour, no matter how grave the provocation. In her words, loyalty in AW is somewhat like a 'test of endurance' and 'getting the job done', while maintaining ones sense of goodness and honour at the individual, unit, service and ultimately, national/international levels (p. 36).

The next two chapters deal with the problem of morally and ethically 'just' behaviour in AW operations vis-à-vis the opponent and the use of non-lethal/unmanned platforms. The larger point that the author reinforces is that the debate on these two issues need not be analysed from either strictly humanist (philosophical) or through narrow professional (military need) approaches. Such binary discussions are fruitless since either/or dyadic prisms do not address the larger picture, which lies somewhere in between. This entire spectrum between these two extremes provides ample space for a larger AW narrative, for which a more nuanced style is needed (pp. 48–49, 63). It is surmised that 'irregulars' can be defined and treated as such, whereas the means employed for counter-response are driven by the national ethos, culture, risk and, more importantly, the technological means available.

The sixth chapter deals with the emerging paradigm of 'humanitarian rescue', popularly known as the 'right to protect' (R2P). This principle is rooted in a new approach to IHL, which is not bound by the typical Westphalian constructs of 'sovereignty and territoriality'. Taking globalisation as the point of departure, the adherents of R2P argue that perpetrators of gross human right violations, like genocide, mass atrocities, ethnic cleansing or utter disregard after catastrophic natural calamities, should be universally treated as virtual *hostis humani generis* (enemy of the mankind) under *jus cogens* (compelling law) regime. The traditional concept of what happens within the boundary of a state is its internal business is no longer tenable and 'state legitimacy' becomes open to question, where it participates or does not take appropriate measures to stop these from happening (pp. 72, 73). Taking Rwanda as the prime example among others, it is posited that the world community as a whole is duty-bound to encourage, compel or even intervene in such circumstances. The author then goes on to touch upon some of the hotly debated topics like those of common and individual responsibilities.

Tempering the enthusiasm of R2P supporters, the author presents the opposite narrative as well, where interventions need not be the option of first resort, but applied selectively where it is guided by an even larger logic of ‘supreme and compelling emergency’ (p. 81).

The next three chapters form the prescriptive part of the work where the author dwells on educating and shaping the militaries, so that they are better equipped, both professionally and morally, to deal with the complexities of AW. In the first of the chapters (seventh), it is articulated that there is an urgent need to emphasise the twin pillars of ‘warrior’ (moral) and ‘guardian’ (protector) ethos (pp. 88–93). The author opines that the current Professional Military Education (PME) curriculum needs to be supplemented by additional investments on ethics and morality, particularly for complex situations, such as AW. Such an approach would effectively channelise the capabilities and capacities of regular soldiers. Further, such indoctrination is as essential for officers as it is for small team leaders since mistakes of ethical and/or moral nature in AW can have momentous fallouts. The work then concentrates on the ‘specifics’ of such a lesson plan where it is averred that moral education need not come at the cost of professional content. This additional curriculum need not be complex, as generally perceived, and the aim should be to adopt a commonsensical approach by highlighting the importance of choosing the right way (often harder) over mere achievement of mission objectives (p. 104). An interesting suggestion by the author is to build narratives, or what she terms as the ‘war stories’, where the same situation is told from different angles and from different levels. Her central argument being that each story has many faces. The story can be told and interpreted differently, on the basis of one’s particular profession/persuasion. Such narratives could also vary when addressed by people at different hierachal levels.

In the concluding chapter, the author summarises by bringing up some key issues, like the unpopularity of AW among the conventional military, from not only the standpoint of the risks involved and their indistinct nature, but also more of a conscientious disagreement (p. 126). There are even larger aspects that remain at play, such as how does one define ‘victory’ in AW. She also touches upon some of the existential issues like the day-to-day situations that a regular soldier encounters in AW and what he/she returns to when the tour of duty is over. Lastly, the author throws up another proverbial ‘hot potato’ about the ambiguities of defining the ‘character’ (as a process) and the ‘nature’ (methodology)

of war, particularly through a ‘just war’ prism. Her final argument is to have open debates about the existing archetypes/images for a holistic understanding of the AW dynamics.

The book is written from a Western perspective, which the author candidly acknowledges in the beginning of book itself. The work is a concise and compact narrative of ‘new wars and new forms of warfare’. While the overall narrative is compelling and readable, editorial slip-ups like spelling errors (Huntington spelt as ‘Huntingdon’) tend to detract. Further, extensive capitalisation and making up abbreviations on the go, especially in the absence of a dedicated glossary, could have been avoided. In certain instances, the author tends to emphasise the philosophical side of things. Hard-nosed practitioners could argue, with some justification, that things need to get done and it is a different world out there, which is quite different from pontificating on such subjects from the safety of four walls. However, for these naysayers, it is also important to understand that the analyst/scholarly community also want these things done, but done better through a ‘more acceptable and legally correct’ framework. The book also does not refer to some recent standout works like that of Mark Osiel on the emerging reciprocity norms in AW. Some of the arguments are also problematic, as the author, in her quest for novelty, has added ambiguities where none exist or should not exist, particularly with reference to the status of combatants (Chapter 6).

This brings to fore the next issue, which is about the takeaways for an Indian observer, commentator or the reader. A striking thing that emerges from a preliminary survey is the ‘scarcity’ of non-Western (including Indian) literature on such issues. Apart from some articles and edited works that tend to dissect the subject along binary lines, there is not much that can be termed as holistic. This is surprising considering that India and its military have been engaged in AW for a long time. The answer to the question that can this work serve as a ‘wake-up call’ is a definite ‘yes’. The ‘Rising India’ story, making it a standout nation, would bring greater scrutiny to state and institutional actions for their ‘justness’. Whether we can discard the extant ‘cocoon like attitude’ would require the policymakers, militaries and the legal and analyst community to revisit some of their parochial positions. Overall, this book is considered worthy of a recognisable space on library shelves as a reference work or a strategic narrative on the subject, but some a priori knowledge by the reader is mandated to grasp the underlying arguments.

