TWO-DIMENSIONAL WARFARE: COMBATANTS, WARRIORS, AND OUR POST-PREDATOR COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

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**The views expressed in this work are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.*

This article explores the effects of our technological way of war, for the first time driving toward total combatant immunity, on the psyche of combatants and the ethos of a warrior. It is a plea for the preservation of a warrior spirit, or at least a warrior class, that views war in a philosophical and personal manner. The article posits that without a sense of the tragic, without a personal test of will and skill often at great individual risk, we can find no real meaning in war. It argues that the warrior dimension of immunity in warfare has somehow altered our experience of war, yet the effects of this 'virtual war' are still ambiguous – we do not yet know whether executing warfare through long-distance video desensitizes the 'remote warrior' or enhances his/her experience of killing. We do not yet know how combatants 'commuting' to war from home and being transported 7000 miles into battle through this 'miracle' of technology will handle the consequences of what the nation is asking them to do. We know we have forever changed the landscape of warfare – and we know we did it all before deeply considering the implications of what we have done.

KEY WORDS: Robotics, military robotics, drones, unmanned aerial vehicles, UAV, remotely piloted aircraft, RPA, Predator, military ethics, autonomous warfare, autonomous weapons

> And what I understand most clearly is the contrast which you make between your own readiness to die and your revulsion at the idea of other people's death. This proves a man's quality…
> Albert Camus, 'Letter to a Man in Despair' (Camus 1965: 149)

> What happens to every major civilization? At some point they civilize themselves right out of warriors.
> Master Sergeant Mike Gomez, USMC UAV Pilot (Featherstone 2007: 46)

Introduction

Technology has aided warfare since the very first human to fashion a spear launched it into the air by the power of his arm. Today technological trends are shaping the way that war is fought and experienced. These trends are driving a desire and capability for near-total

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immunity from attack. Our technological advances in communications, sensors and software are allowing the development of armed unmanned vehicles and the possibility of lethal autonomous robots that allow us to control war's violent acts from many thousands of miles away. At the same time, our ability to see actions in real time half a world away alters our experience of war and changes the dynamics for those involved in what has been the uniquely human and ultimate expression of contested political will. Our lengthy and recent wars have sped these changes and threatened to impose on us a new template for war before we have had the opportunity to understand it.

We have not yet attempted to understand the impact of this distant war of immunity on those we have asked to execute it. Does killing from afar desensitize those doing the killing or does it enhance its effects? How do civilians, through near-instantaneous coverage of the battlefield, react to and understand what they see? We do not understand how warfare with immunity will affect combatants, both that larger population of uniformed professionals and volunteers whose duty puts them in harm's way, and the smaller subset who see their calling in far more transcendental terms and who find in war and its preparation an existential quest for personal improvement far in excess of simple duty. How does the technology of warfare with immunity affect the warrior class? What does it do to the warrior ethos in our modern age? Does the very nature of war's dirty business of killing, regardless of the means, drive a need for individuals who see warfare in far more graduated tones than the promise of clinical battle? This article attempts to answer these questions and foster a debate that has been too long in coming.

The Long Evolution toward Combatant Immunity in War

Ideas about killing from ever greater distance, with ever increasing force and with ever more protection for those involved are as old as warfare itself. Such are the evolutionary stages of the weapons and counter-weapons of war. In hand-to-hand combat, the one with the longer arms has a distinct advantage. A longer-bladed weapon changes this dynamic, as does a spiked ball on a chain or an even longer lance. Around 1800 BC an age-old hunting and warfare weapon was improved to the point of domination that lasted for thousands of years (van Creveld 1991: 12).

The composite bow was capable of sending its projectiles hundreds of yards downrange (van Creveld 1991: 12–14). An archer was then able to stand behind the blood and sweat of face-to-face combat and lob arrows into the opposing side. If his bow was capable of greater distance than his rival's, he was effectively immune from attack unless he allowed his adversary too close an approach. Of course his was not a life without risk. Battle lines morph; strategic, operational and tactical errors are made. The fog of war allows for its friction to chew up armies and relegate them to the pages of history. Hence, self-protection has also always been a part of war.

Weapons and countermeasures that increase lethality for one in relation to the other always cause perturbations in the thinking on what is right, wrong and legal in war. In 1139, the Second Lateran Council declared the crossbow a disgraceful weapon because it 'could be used from a distance thus enabling a man to strike without the risk of himself being struck' (Green 1993: 21). It was considered 'dastardly' for its common user's ability to un-horse a knight of the realm. Such is the jaded eye of those engaged in the mortal contest of war; such is the inequity in the standards of conduct, which are often written by the stronger side.

What seems clear in studying the evolution of weapons is that three significant technological trends have accompanied the general growth in war-making technologies. Technological growth tends to increase the speed of warfare, both in the movement of combatants to and in battle, and in the time from strategy to execution or individual decisions to action. It tends to increase combatants' ability to make battle persist. Finally, this growth has tended to increase the distance from which weapons can be used effectively and therefore the numbers of targets that can be held at risk. This article concentrates only on the technological trend of distance in warfare,[1] with a particular interest in an important nuance: the ability to fight with increasing immunity. Technology is finally making this nuance possible, and it is this that may be altering warfare in ways never seen before. If there is a revolution in military affairs in this generation, the ability to fight with immunity is likely it.

Technologies Enabling Immunity

The composite bow and the dastardly crossbow are but two early examples of technological advances that increased the range of battle. Later, rifles and cannons put rear areas under fire. Now Tomahawk missiles fly hundreds of miles to their targets. Predator and Reaper operators sit in air-conditioned trailers in the Nevada desert and launch missiles from airplanes thousands of miles away. The latter two would not have been possible without the advances of the information age.

Some technologies allowing employment at greater ranges are carried aboard modern weapons and are integral to their architecture. These include onboard navigation systems and advanced propulsion systems allowing weapons to drive toward their targets. Seeker technologies (radar, infrared, laser, etc.) specializing in particular portions of the spectrum of light allow weapons to 'see', compare and select targets. Software solutions that control many of the functions above and also aid in classifying and distinguishing legitimate targets from innocents and noncombatants are resident in all modern weapons systems. These technologies have aided the move toward greater precision – the ability to hit only what you intend – in weapon delivery. This precision allows greater effective ranges as weapons stray less over larger distances and time periods than ever before.

These technologies have given rise to military robotics and autonomous weapons. A robot is a programmable machine incorporating a degree of artificial intelligence allowing for some degree of autonomy and an ability to sense, perceive and act in or on its environment. A robot's capacity for unsupervised operations determines its autonomy. Autonomous weapons are robotic weapons whose level of autonomy is based on their ability to trigger a destructive mechanism, select and identify targets, move under power or by the forces of physics, and navigate to their targets (Riza 2013: 17–18; see also the article by Heather Roff in this issue).[2] Unmanned aircraft are the most ubiquitous and recognizable form of the military robot, but most current weapons systems have some form of robotics on board. The Tomahawk missile mentioned above is an example of an autonomous weapon in that it has an onboard ability to find, classify and destroy its target, given initial programming conditions. These weapons move those involved in combat farther away from the scene of their weapons' ultimate end state. While these technologies reside on the weapon platform itself, other off-board systems enable them. Many of these make our modern, wirelessly connected lives possible.

Navigation satellites and global communications networks enable precise positioning and an ability to control robotic weapons such as unmanned aircraft from anywhere on earth. These same communications allow for near-real-time data to be fed into intelligence centers where computers and humans sift and filter them for actionable information. Communications technologies allow the projection of real-time video into control centers where generals can 'reach through'[3] and direct military operations on scales and timelines never dreamed of even 20 years ago. This technology also brings the possibility of near-live, full-motion video of the war and its devastation to segments of the civilian population who have never had the opportunity to see such images before.

Communications technology, quite separate from the actual weaponry or the platforms that deliver it, has the potential to alter the way that we view what it means to be in combat. If we can fly an airplane from 7000 miles away, launch its weapons, and broadcast the video to audiences equally as remote from where the warhead eventually explodes, how do we characterize who is and is not 'in combat', who is and is not 'at war?' Is killing in this way made easier because of the LCD or plasma barrier we view it through, or is it enhanced by the length of time spent studying a target before committing to lethality? Sometimes we seem to be arguing both with simultaneity. If combat is filled with ambiguity, so too is the classification of those who perform it.

The Warrior and Ethos

There is a distinction between those who simply fight in armed conflict and those professionals who find in the preparation for and actions in the realm of mortal combat a philosophy that can guide their lives. Becoming a combatant, a legal term that allows for certain rights under the law of armed conflict, is relatively simple. All that is generally required, after following the actions to ensure that the fighting is legitimate under the concepts of *jus ad bellum*, is that one wear a uniform and carry arms openly. Save for a few exemptions, such as chaplains, most of those who join the militaries of modern states or organize themselves under nonstate actors commencing armed conflict are combatants (their degree of legality is determined by how well they conform to the laws of war). Many may have never had any intention of actually taking up arms and partaking in combat operations.[4] It would be incongruent to bestow upon those lacking such intent with a title describing those whose entire lives are dedicated to a personal growth through the profession of arms, the intricacy of the proper and proportional application of force, and the avoidance of the possibility of wanton killing brought on by doing so only from a sense of duty. This much smaller subset of combatants is made up of warriors.

Richard Strozzi-Heckler (1990: 6), in a book about his experience as an aikido master training Special Forces soldiers in the ancient ways of the martial art, describes various warrior traditions and says: 'These historical and mythical warriors found their strength and integrity by defeating their own inner demons, living in harmony with nature, and serving their fellow man.' As philosopher Christopher Coker (2003: 58) explains citing the ancient Greeks, they 'offered warriors the realization of their own humanity. They found in war a master text by which they came to know themselves better'. It is a far more personal concept of war than most Western militaries allow for today. This goes far beyond a legal status called combatant. It describes an ethos.

The warrior ethos begins with the manner in which those in the profession of arms view their chosen craft. Importantly, warriors view it as a craft, possibly even as an art.

It takes many years to cultivate and must begin with an acceptance that the struggle in war can lead to personal growth. The warrior spirit is a sense that what a warrior does in war and how he (or indeed she) comes at it on a personal level transcends the cold rationality of performing a mission, completing an objective, or taking a hill. Coker explains this existential nature of war in language that famous French author Albert Camus (whom I will come back to below) would surely understand. He says it is 'the reason that warriors are prepared to die (as opposed to kill)' (Coker 2003: 54). This ethos neither ignores nor celebrates the necessity of taking human life. It understands sacrifice only on a personal level and in relation to fellow warriors, and therefore does not expect or desire any gratitude or recognition of status other than that of 'warrior'. For the warrior, combat is the ultimate and artistic expression of a life spent in its preparation. Coker (2003: 33) says it is that which 'still celebrates combat as the supreme expression of military life'. This is an important distinction from how mere combatants, that legally defined group, may approach war, because it goes far beyond duty. In perhaps a gross oversimplification, combatants do what they are told to do on the field of battle; warriors understand why such things must be done. Combat for the warrior is an intricate dance, a test of personal will and technical skill, played for the highest of stakes where form in means is as important, perhaps more so, than the desired end. The end state must be achieved, to be sure. That is the reason for military action, but those who can perform it with more finesse and elegance are better respected, by ally and foe alike, for their mastery of the craft.[5] It is this finesse and the deep understanding of war at every level that acts as an internal constraint and can reduce the destructiveness of battle.[6]

In short, a warrior must be technically proficient, but he or she views war more philosophically. It is this philosophic view of war and the warrior that may be altered by the technologies that make fighting with immunity possible. One has to question whether the existential nature of the warrior's relationship to warfare can survive if the warrior does not have to face the end of existence in combat. One also ought to question what else in the realm of warfare might be lost along with the warrior ethos if it fades under immunity.

High Definition Warfare

Ever since the first Gulf War, the term 'CNN effect' has been in the collective vocabulary. It is the ability of a wide public to see, through the lens of the cable news outlets, their wars being waged with a simultaneity they had not known before. Our technology allows us to play back video from weapons impacting targets, young Marines facing insurgents, and cockpit communications as helicopter pilots decide to fire. These images make us feel like we are part of the action in one sense, yet may detach us from the consequences on the other. It is a dichotomy that we are familiar with. We read about the depiction of violence in movies and video games and anecdotally relate it to a desensitization in real-life crimes of mass violence – or we argue against any effects at all. On the other hand, news organizations routinely censor images of graphic violence and death in trouble spots around the world. Why, if they do not affect us? We do not have a coherent understanding of how viewing violence and death through high-definition video screens impinges on our conscience. The jury is still out on what the *real* CNN effect is.

Killing with immunity almost certainly has a psychology all its own, and we are just now beginning to investigate it. Remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) operators are 'going to war' in ways that no human ever has. Remote combatants live in 'combat' for 12 hours a day

then go home to household chores, homework, sometimes-sick kids and some sense of normalcy.[7] But how normal can it be? It is fair to say that we just do not yet know the full effects of distant killing and the 'two-lives paradigm' that it produces. We are as unsure about what effect it may have on those members of the civilian populace who have never witnessed such actions before.

Voyeurism and War

During the first Gulf War, the public watched bombs falling on targets all around Iraq. They saw the anti-aircraft gunfire. They could hear the pitch of the reporters' voices in Baghdad and Tel Aviv rise with the increasing note of the air-raid sirens. It felt real. It was not. Not for those of us many thousands of miles away and seeing it only through a television screen. The images of war come to living rooms every night and have been doing so, at least while the nation has been engaged in combat operations, since the Vietnam War. What we saw on the evening news then, what we watched during the Gulf War and in every conflict since, is not really war. Coker (2003: 71) says what we see is not, as people think, exhaustive. It is only a glimpse, and it limits the imagination by making things visible. He explains:

> …televised images… do not provide any insight into anything that approaches irony, conflict, or dilemma – the dilemma, for example, of having to act cruelly in the name of humanity or humanitarianism or at the very least accept the need for a human cost. That is the stuff of the tragic sense of history. (Coker 2003: 71)

In the end we see war as a two-dimensional parody of itself: 'We experience war without understanding it' (Coker 2003: 71). Coker says that during Desert Storm, the grainy images of targeting information, contrasted with the computerized war games used for entertainment, distanced the public emotionally and psychologically: 'Here was no community of fate with the enemy' (Coker 2003: 173). We have assumed that the same detachment is true for those actually doing the killing.

Emotional Disengagement

One view of the effect of viewing distant killing by video is that it creates an emotional barrier that insulates those engaged in it from the consequences of their actions. Consider what author David Grossman (2009: 4) says: '…there is within most men an intense resistance to killing their fellow man. A resistance so strong that, in many circumstances, soldiers on the battlefield will die before they can overcome it.' One way to solve this problem is to 'introduce distance into the equation' (Stoner 2010: 110). There is a reasonable perception that distance decreases the resistance to killing, but hard data to support the supposition are hard to find. An ability to fight with immunity may lower the bar for using force. It may even alter our notion of whether we are at war at all. Consider the ease with which two recent administrations have reportedly used unmanned aircraft in multiple nations that the USA is not currently engaged with in armed conflict. Do anecdotal strategic issues point to a removal of a sense of consequence from those actually pushing weapons release buttons or pulling triggers at the tactical level?

Psychologists can claim that killing over distance emotionally and morally disengages the combatant (Krishnan 2009: 128). When we view weapons' impacts on the news,

we rarely see casualties, and it leads some to question whether we can understand the consequences. The same questions often surface about bomber or fighter crews looking only through cockpit displays and firing from high above the fray. Similarly during the bombing of Hamburg, tens of thousands of people were killed on the night of 28 July 1943, when the Royal Air Force (RAF) firebombed the town. Grossman says:

> If bomber crew members had had to turn a flamethrower on each one of the seventy thousand women and children… the awfulness and trauma inherent in the act would have been of such a magnitude that it simply would not have happened. (Grossman 2009: 100)

The bomber crews were nowhere close to their victims that night, and they could not see individual deaths.

To take it one step further, this virtual war,[8] perhaps nowhere as pronounced as it is for RPA operators, may remove certain feelings and emotion normally associated with combat. Coker (2003: 176) explains that virtual reality cannot simulate the feeling of flying into a barrage of fire: 'It cannot reproduce the battlefield experience: the knowledge that in the real world, weapons kill. A number of pilots after a bombing outside Baghdad in 1998 complained of experiencing fear.' If simulation could produce surprise in a pilot over experiencing what most would consider a normal response to people trying to kill him, it might be having similar, and probably unknown, effects on 'remote warriors' or those tasked in the future with handling autonomous weapons. Reverend G. Simon Harak (quoted in Stoner 2010: 110), director of the Center for Peacemaking at Marquette University, is concerned about the latter. 'Effectively, what these remote control robots are doing is removing people farther and farther from the consequences of their actions.' But this is not the whole of the story.

Never So Close

Remote warriors, at least in the present form, are not analogous to the RAF aircrews who razed Hamburg. Consider the comments of a former wing commander at Creech Air Force Base in Nevada where the majority of RPA operations are flown:

> …it's not really 8,000 miles away, it's 18 inches away. We're closer… than we've ever been as a service. There's no detachment. Those employing the system are very involved at a personal level in combat. You hear the AK-47 going off, the intensity of the voice on the radio calling for help. You're looking at him, 18 inches away from him… (O'Connell 2010: 13)

As RPA operators sit 18 inches away from seeing the results of their actions, it may have an effect that we have not yet fully characterized. In fact, it is interesting how on the one hand we talk of the sanitized nature of this virtual war, while on the other we sometimes note the severe reaction that the public has in seeing images of real violence on television, particularly when things do not go exactly as planned (Koplow 2010: 42).[9] Perhaps virtual war is not as sanitized as some critics think.

Watching anti-aircraft fire on screen or seeing the columns of smoke rising from a recently destroyed target is hardly the same as watching men die. A former deputy commandant of the USAF Weapons School[10] flew one of the first close air support fighters to arrive on scene during the botched Operation Anaconda. Orbiting over what would

become known as Robert's Ridge, he saw men shot, one by one, as they attempted to egress a stricken helicopter. In telling his story to a group of hardened Weapons School instructors and students, he paused numerous times in order to control his emotions. He was instrumental in saving several soldiers that day, at times dropping 500-pound bombs within 50 meters of friendly troops, and was awarded the Silver Star for his actions. He would have traded it all to watch those he saw slain walk down the steps of an airplane that brought them home to their families. It is safe to say that there are plenty of times, even from the view through a tiny video screen, when the consequences of actions are seared into memory forever.

Dr Maryann Cusimano Love notes that military Predator pilots seem to be getting post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at higher rates than soldiers in combat zones (O'Connell 2010: 13). There are anecdotes, like the one above from the wing commander, that tell the story of the long hours of boredom, the exhilaration of doing a job well, and the later effects as the consequences sink in. There must be times when as the order is given to fire, there is a certainty about the unintended civilian deaths that are sure to follow. Official phrases like 'guilt by association' and 'collateral damage' are just words. They fade over a period much shorter than the images seemingly locked in the mind. There are opportunities to understand the consequences of actions even in virtual war. There is certainly a cost, although we really do not yet know what it is. We cannot now conceive how robotic or autonomous weapons will play into this dimension. And what of this idea of living in the world of combat and the world at home near simultaneously?

The Two-Worlds Phenomenon

During Operation Allied Force over Serbia and Kosovo, every B-2 sortie was flown from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri. It made for some long sorties, but it also was a shift in the way that Americans went to war. When asked what it was like to step away from his house knowing in 24–36 hours he would be in combat, a B-2 pilot told the author, 'it was surreal'. One day he was dropping bombs on Serbia, the next he was cutting his grass. It might be even stranger for those flying unmanned aircraft on combat sorties from Nevada.

Dr Cusimano Love quotes a Predator operator saying: 'You're going to war for twelve hours, shooting weapons at targets, directing kills on enemy combatants. And then you get in the car and… within 20 minutes you're sitting at the dinner table talking to your kids about their homework' (O'Connell 2010: 13). Many combatants could not imagine the constant yo-yo of emotion between gearing up for the business of death and winding down so as not to bring it home. A day or two before deploying, many begin a process of disengagement from normal life to avoid the rapid crash that might occur when the reality of war sets in. Is an RPA operator's emotional rollercoaster tempered by the fact he or she will not, unless catastrophe of another kind strikes, face death while sitting 'in combat' in the ground station? Possibly, but the RPA operator's view of death, day in and day out, juxtaposed against their experience of working on homework with their kids in the periods in between has to take a toll on their psyche.

There is more than meets the eye with regard to the CNN effect. For the case of remote warfare such as is conducted by RPA operators, there is no doubt that the killing can feel very real, perhaps more so than for fighter or bomber crews who never see the aftermath of their actions with such clarity. The fact that they kill with immunity and have

yet to be confronted with the reality of their own death in combat has to have some psychological effect; we just do not know yet what it is or even how to characterize it. It is possible that RPA operators will face greater instances of psychological trauma due to their actions, but it is as likely that much of this postulated trauma occurs because of the constant swinging back and forth from 'combat' to home life. This is a new way to fight a war, and there is simply no way to predict how this combination of killing with immunity mixed with the emotional pendulum of normal residential life will turn out over the long term. It is but one way that war with immunity is affecting those who fight it.

Existentialism and the Post-Predator World

On the first day of a recent foray into military academia, the commander addressed his new charges. He said: 'Good morning warriors! … no, I don't really like that term… you're all combatants.' Of course not all *were* combatants. It is a legal term, and the chaplains in the class were probably quite taken aback. Still, it is fairly certain that not all with combatant status could be fairly judged as warriors either.

There is a saying among those who fly high-performance combat aircraft that captures the difference between legal combatant status and existential warrior ethos: 'There are fighter pilots, and there are pilots who fly fighters.' This means that there are those who are likely born to it and who see what they do as a life-affirming calling, and there are those who view it simply as a job. There are surely similar sayings in other military and civilian fields. There are warriors, and there are those who pull triggers. There were indeed more combatants than warriors in the room that day. In our technological way of war, there is some question as to whether any qualify as warriors at all.

There is no denying a reader's possible judgment that there may be a longing for an over-glorified, white-scarf past. There is also fertile ground, after the historic firing of the USAF chief of staff and secretary over a lack of impetus to increase unmanned aircraft capabilities, for those who see the perceived reluctance of services to press forward with unmanned systems as simply a culture problem (Singer 2009: 252) belonging to what the Department of Defense's *Unmanned Systems Roadmap* describes as those 'pockets of resistance' that must be 'eliminated' (DOD 2009: 40). Andrew Krepinevich jokes that 'no fighter pilot is ever going to pick up a girl at a bar by saying he flies a U.A.V. [unmanned aerial vehicle]… Fighter pilots don't want to be replaced' (Singer 2009: 252). There are academics, some military, who having never been in the combat arms, arguably fail to acknowledge the depth of what a warrior knows to be true about the experience of war (Cook, J. 2014: 106–111). My claim would be that they do not fully understand the value of constraints on war and its conduct that a warrior's ethos and presence bring to the idea and concept of battle. These are at best retreats to stereotype and at worst attempts at crushing dissent.

Unmanned systems capable of lethal action call into question what it means to engage in combat and confront our sense of what it means to be a warrior. This is certainly a culture issue, but on a whole different plane than Singer, Krepinevich and Cook seem to allude to. It is important to understand that experiencing combat and being a warrior are two very different things, and our misunderstanding of their relationship causes friction in the ranks and in our own sense of who we are as war fighters. As Singer (2010) says: 'This disconnection from the battlefield also leads to a demographic change in who does what

in war and the issues it provokes about a soldier's identity… or status… or the nature of combat stress and fatigue.' This is Camus' (1965: 130) disgust, in reverse, with veterans' claims of who had it rougher on the front: 'When everything has been made vile and sordid, they still try to establish an order of merit. That is how they survive.'

Consider these two views. In recent discussions about our ability to strike from afar and with total immunity, a senior officer and former fighter wing commander remarked: 'Where's the chivalry in that?'[11] Then there is a young officer just out from the Air Force Academy who speaks with wonderment about how flying Predators is seen 'as this geeky thing to do' despite having seen far more combat than fighter pilots in recent years (Singer 2009: 253). Misgivings about unmanned warfare are not about pick-up lines or shiny stars on epaulettes. They are about a near-dormant and continually – institutionally – repressed sense of our warrior spirit.

A Warrior among Them?

The warrior's place in modern warfare seems to be at a crossroads. On the one hand is a repression of what it means to be a warrior and a discounting of the deep ethical and existential meanings that it implies (Kraugerud 2011: 264).[12] On the other hand is a military leadership so consumed with the politics of inclusion that it attempts to describe every combatant as a warrior without itself truly understanding the depth that the latter entails. There is a tacit dismissal of the warrior ethos in this kind of inclusion – issuing black berets to all recruits or removing patches denoting graduation from elite schools from utility uniforms – and an implicit claim to such status for all through recitation of creeds or sayings taught early in basic training. These are, in my view, disingenuous at best. A small percentage of trainees will experience combat or be assigned to the combat arms. Fewer still will ever consider themselves warriors. Such shallow acts may be attempts at maintaining an all-volunteer force or creating a sense of resiliency, but they have no appreciable effect on creating an ethos that comes only through deep introspection, education and successful completion of exceedingly difficult and selective training.

Consider this in the context of Strozzi-Heckler's black-belt test:

> It was like one of those sporting events that are later memorialized, perhaps a World Series game or a bullfight, during which every last spectator realizes at some level that what is happening out on the field is more than a game, but rather something achingly beautiful and inevitable, an enactment in space and time of how the universe works, how things are. (Strozzi-Heckler 1990: xi)

It is this personal and aesthetic quality of war that we risk losing with the advent of robotic weaponry and immunity. Would we recognize a no-hitter by a pitching machine with the same awe as we do when we see the battle between the man on the mound and the men at the plate? Would we feel the same sense of loss when in the ninth inning the last at bat slings one into the upper deck in center field? Would we understand such an event to have any meaning whatsoever? Our sense of the warrior and his/her sense of his/her place in war are not trivial athletic endeavors – baseball and black belts. But we must understand that the concept of a warrior and his/her place are also not trivial. They should not be discounted as quaint remembrances, the mysticism of a bygone age, even though

technology, service culture and book reviewers may attempt to do so. The aesthetic quality of war, without glorifying what it ultimately requires, is what helps ground it as a meaningful human activity.

Tragedy, in the ancient sense of the hero's fall from grace and eventual understanding of some deep philosophical lesson, has long been a part of the world of art. It is part of the human experience, perhaps even integrally so. The degree to which automated warfare and the prism through which we view distant killing removes us from this sense of the tragic alters our ability to understand the essence of what we do in war. Coker (2003: 67) describes it this way: 'Without a sense of the tragic, it is difficult to maintain a humanistic understanding of war or, for that matter, for soldiers to see themselves as warriors.' The warrior spirit is intricately linked to this sense of the tragic and drives war into the personal realm. He or she strives to maintain the nobility of the tragic hero before the fall. As Strozzi-Heckler (1990: 66) says: 'It occurs to me that part of being human is the longing, or perhaps even need, for the experiences of courage, selflessness, heroism, service, and transcendence.' It might be this need, the recognition that warfare with immunity directly affects it, and the manner in which we have attempted to address it, that cause the friction that Singer describes above. How do we know who is at war and who is not? How do we address the chasm between the senior officer's view of chivalry, the junior officer's view of combat, the warrior concept, and the twenty-first-century idea that all combatants must be warriors?

A Special Forces officer, recently returned from combat duty in Iraq, when asked if he thought that a Predator operator was at war, said: 'No. He doesn't meet my definition' (Singer 2009: 331). Yet, the United States Air Force, so far the farthest along the path of unmanned warfare, tends to bend over backward attempting to contradict that officer. Recall the Creech wing commander and his view of being only 18 inches away from the action. Air Force recruiting advertisements, heavily laced with unmanned aircraft and cyber-specialists, tell the world who the *real* warriors are in today's fight. Senior officers use terms like 'reach back' and 'deployed in place' to communicate the supposedly equal contributions of those working normal shifts at bases in the continental United States with those going outside or over 'the wire' in a combat theater.

There is only one problem with this seemingly all-inclusive view of combat. On a grand scale, if this is combat, so is sitting in the Pentagon, or any number of headquarters around the world, with the ability to watch – or direct – the war through the live video feed. Perhaps, for that matter, so is sitting in an armchair and watching that same video on the evening news. In our struggle to define what it means to be in combat in our post-Predator world, we run the risk of diluting the concept beyond any recognition or meaning.

During the Second World War, the Japanese command attempted to turn their nation, by conversion of each individual citizen, into a warrior nation by hearkening back to the samurai tradition. In doing so, it lost a little of that great tradition and ultimately failed to achieve the short-term objective. As Coker (2003: 123) explains: 'A whole nation cannot be made into warriors; in its attempt to do so, the high command subverted the very notion of the warrior's honor.' There is a danger of doing the same in attempting to stretch the concept of what it means to take part in combat, or worse, misconstruing what it means to be a warrior as we continue proliferating armed unmanned systems. An 'everyone a warrior' mentality, made far easier by the ability to employ weapons in a

theater thousands of miles away, fails to respect an admittedly fading but still proud warrior spirit that rests at the core of our services' combat arms. There must remain some kind of personal sense of the tragic in a high-stakes contest to maintain a meaningful view of warfare. For those involved in it, a personal investment, an understanding of the potential for personal growth at war, insulates them from the possibility of a too-easy acceptance of killing. We ought to be fearful of those who would kill simply out of a sense of duty without considering a deeper meaning. It is probably better for the one with the finger on the trigger to also be someone who takes war personally. If not, we will have lost war's final constraint. A Department of Defense staffer and former US Army officer, when confronted with this concept, said: 'The privates are not going to read Kant.'[13] Perhaps they should. Failing that, and in order to fully understand the existential nature of war, at some point we must address the concept of personal risk.

The Nobility of Risk

Albert Camus, the French Nobel laureate, playwright and pacifist, grew up as a pied noir (a person of European origin living in Algeria during French rule) in Algeria, was a member of the French Resistance during the Second World War, and later was dismayed by both French and Algerian atrocities during the 1954–62 Algerian War. In his 'Letter to a Man in Despair' that begins this article, Camus (1965: 148–152) consoles the man with the idea that his willingness to risk his life in the struggle of war not only proves his quality but gives him a means for improving his being and accomplishing what at first seems hopeless. This seems extraordinary for a pacifist, but then Camus' life of resistance, including as an active participant during history's most expansive war, is itself extraordinary.

Just war philosopher Michael Walzer, approaching the issue of risk in distant warfare from a broader theoretical construct, initially argues against Camus' stance. He says that no principle of just war theory bars distant warfare (Walzer 2004: 16),[14] although Camus argues that one should not be allowed to kill unless one is prepared to die. Camus' idea certainly does not square with our views about keeping our soldiers far from harm, says Walzer, 'yet there is a wider sense in which Camus is right' (Walzer 2004: 16). Walzer is alluding to the idea that it seems morally problematic if one side is able to kill freely without having to submit to the same equality on the field of battle, to make judgments about others' mortality without themselves submitting to the same judgment by those whom they struggle against. It is the author's supposition, not one widely held, that this kind of moral equality is the basis of combatant rights under the law of war. How can the desired need for courage, selflessness, service and transcendence that Strozzi-Heckler mentions be met in a world of immunity? The answer, and dilemma, may reside in the very form of technological war that we have come to know so well.

The Western way of war, again from Coker (2003: 59), is nearly completely instrumental and based on what it takes to kill members of the other side, whereas 'Non-western strategies ask a very different question: What does it take to persuade soldiers to die for their beliefs?' It is in this sense that Camus arguably is right: that for the warrior there can be no sense of accomplishment, no growth, without the test of mortal danger. Without it what he/she experiences is not war but simply a game. It is important to note that one's willingness to do what is necessary does not mean it must end in death. But it is this

willingness, even at great personal risk, to engage in the personal test of will and skill that is the heart of the artful view of battle. What follows without such a view, as philosopher Martin Cook (2004: 92) says, is 'a truly desultory and futile exercise of military power'.

Finding such Men and Women

There still lives a core of those with the warrior spirit, a core capable of asking what it takes to persuade men and women to be prepared to die rather than simply kill. It is this concept that allows pilots to fly into known surface-to-air missile envelopes in order to rescue friendly forces or deliver the proper ordnance for the job. It is the reason that men will burst through doors in insurgent-held buildings or throw themselves on live grenades or injured comrades during a firefight. It is a personal sense of the tragic and a view of war as 'achingly beautiful and inevitable' that sings to its existential nature. It is easy to recognize those who grasp its depth. They are warrior-leaders, often not part of the official chain of command, who rarely shine outside of the warrior's chosen environment – that maelstrom of personal strife and sacrifice filled with men trying to survive and kill one another. And yet, knowing the unfortunate inevitability of war, it is desirable to seek out and follow those who find personal meaning in its depth. To do so holds the promise of avoiding wanton killing and the ends-focused mindset that bore the destructiveness of attrition warfare. For men and women at war, the highest honor belongs to those about whom others will profess a willingness to cross any border, breach any threshold, or meet any host behind or beside.

The warrior ethos remains an important concept in modern warfare, but there is no guarantee that it will remain that way. We may very well be moving into an era when the concept of combat is a distant memory. Perhaps it is already so. Unmanned and robotic warfare may accelerate the demise of the warrior spirit, or it may force a new understanding of this ancient concept. We would do well to think about it deeply, maybe even meditatively, before we find ourselves overrun by the consequences of our action and inaction. Simply redefining combat as everything we do and see in war, or telling everyone in uniform that they are warriors, is not the answer. Xenophon's warning from the fifth century rings true: 'There is no beauty when something is forced or misunderstood' (Strozzi-Heckler 1990: 62).

Summary

The way that we characterize distant or remote warfare – warfare with immunity – is ambiguous at best. We seemingly cannot decide whether viewing death through video monitors in manned or unmanned aircraft reduces the resistance to kill or enhances our experience of it. We cannot decide whether the CNN effect turns war into a spectator sport or allows us to experience it with more feeling and empathy than we ever have before. Services struggle to shape a culture that conforms to reality, both new and old, and in doing so are likely being far too inclusive about what it means to be a warrior or even experience combat. For those on the front lines of the new robotic warfare, it is important not to misconstrue feelings of regret, possible instances of PTSD, and whatever psychological toll virtual war may take on those who participate in it as evidence of, or even substitutes for, the concepts of combat and warrior. Emotional connection to the

consequences of the work that unmanned vehicle operators do does not equate to a warrior ethos, although it is certainly possible that many have it. Arguing otherwise is to retreat to shallow justifications of status in the frictional world of service culture. This ultimately clouds the fundamental issues at hand. We cannot allow such retreat if we truly hope to solve them at any meaningful level below simple pride. Robotic and autonomous warfare is simply too new for us to have a firm grasp of what it is we experience. The data are simply not in. Yet we know we have likely altered a segment of the experience of war forevermore, and we know we did it all without proper thought and foresight.

We currently have a small and fading warrior class, those at the tip of the spear and able to employ lethal force in combat. Whether we have, or can maintain, a warrior ethos is debatable. This article argues that it is desirable in that it sequesters, in a small number of highly trained, educated and introspective individuals, the necessary mental and technical skills required to properly – to justly – employ force with the intent and consequence of destroying human life. These are concepts that do not easily reconcile with simple 1s and 0s. They do not square with the simplicity of merely putting on a particular uniform or reciting some creed. A concerted effort to maintain such an ethos does not necessarily preclude advancements in unmanned and robotic warfare, nor the communications technologies that bring them all to life, although there are significant hurdles to overcome. Regardless, we cannot allow the warrior concept to atrophy without due consideration and without something to replace it. As retired Air Force general and judge advocate Charles Dunlap warns:

> Although the extent to which the proliferation of long-distance, push-button war serves to replace that ethos with a new ethic is as yet uncertain, it is imperative that whatever emerges instills in tomorrow's soldiers those moral underpinnings which will further develop the application of ethical and legal norms in future conflicts. (Dunlap 1999: 43–44)

Warfare has been and should always remain a human endeavor. It should remain an uncertain environment where great institutional and personal risk must be weighed against what is to be gained. The seeming ease with which governments currently employ robotic weapons, the lack of public engagement until only recently and after more than a decade of war, the lack of thought we all give to a back-page article about this or that drone strike, ought to serve as a warning. Whether viewing high-definition war desensitizes or enhances our experience, we should not allow the same technology, with its propensity for reducing risk, to generate in us an apathy about killing other human beings. We should long for a select group of individuals who have spent a lifetime in deep consideration of the possibilities and consequences of war. We should insist on a thriving warrior class despite the technological trends, and we should approach its ethos with respectful awe. We must recognize that being more warlike, in this time of persistent conflict, does not make us more warrior-like. In fact it may make us less so, a situation that we should approach with deep concern. 'Civilizing' ourselves 'right out of warriors' is oxymoronic. In the end, civilization is better served by the existence of its warriors and their ethos than by attempts to drive both toward extinction. For meaningful 'two-dimensional warfare', how we preserve this ethos and those who harbor it is one of the important philosophical questions of our age.

NOTES

1. For more on evolutionary technological trends in warfare, see 'The Spectra of Impunity in Warfare' in Riza (2013: ch. 4).
2. Directive 3000.09 (DOD 2009: 13) defines autonomous weapon systems as:

   > A weapon system that, once activated, can select and engage targets without further intervention by a human operator. This includes human-supervised autonomous weapon systems that are designed to allow human operators to override operation of the weapon system, but can select and engage targets without further human input after activation.

3. There is a term used in operational planning that captures the work of intelligence analysts and others who support forward operations from garrison in major bases in the continental United States. It is called 'reach back'. 'Reach through' is the author's concept of the opposite, whereby general officers can direct actual combat operations from far in the rear area because of perceived situational awareness granted by projected full-motion video or other intelligence feeds.
4. For instance, those in food service, the law, clerical and supply work, or recreation services might fit this description.
5. For instance, Rommel was worthy of Patton's respect.
6. See Michael Walzer's (2006: 139–143) discussion on soldiers electing not to kill even when militarily necessary.
7. This is not exclusive to RPA operators. Some bomber and fighter crews flying in Operation Allied Force also experienced this. Those assigned to Aviano Air Base flew combat sorties from their home base. B-2 pilots flew combat sorties from Whiteman Air Force Base where they were stationed and where their families lived.
8. Journalist, author and politician Michael Ignatieff coined this term in his writings on the NATO intervention in Kosovo (see Ignatieff 2000; see also Ignatieff 1998, 2001).
9. Consider the case of the commuter train that entered the weapon system operator's view seconds before it impacted and destroyed the bridge that the train was about to transit during Operation Allied Force. Innocents were killed, and the public reaction was significant.
10. The USAF Weapons School is the US Air Force's premier tactical flying school. The course of instruction is a grueling six months of flying and academics. It is often called a doctorate in tactical aviation.
11. Personal conversation with a former fighter wing commander and brigadier general.
12. See Kraugerud's (2011) referenced article in the *Journal of Military Ethics* for an in-depth discussion of the importance of the concept of the ethical warrior.
13. Conversation with an acquaintance in Department of Defense Policy, December 2010.
14. Walzer is speaking here in terms of pure distance, not specifically of immunity. It is a subtle difference but recall the archer with a better composite bow. While he had superior distance in weaponry, he was still at risk of death due to his proximity to the battlefield and the dynamic nature of warfare. He could not kill with immunity.

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