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Soft War: The Ethics of Unarmed Conflict

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Soft War: The Ethics of Unarmed Conflict, ed. Michael L. Gross and Tamar Meisels. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017. 294 pages. \$27.99.

Over the last twenty years and arguably long before that, the line between “war” and “not war” has become more blurred than it ever has been. In part, this is because of a greatly increased number of actors using force to achieve a variety of goals, but also because new technologies and applications present grave challenges to attempts to determine what are “acts of war.” Cyber attacks, economic sanctions, so-called media warfare, and lawfare now exist in the increasingly large and complex gray zone separating peace and war.

There has been little examination of applicable rules and guidelines to encourage and ensure right behavior in this growing gray zone. *Soft War* examines the potential benefit in applying the law of armed conflict (LOAC) and the just war tradition to these arenas of soft conflict. The result is a collection of fourteen eclectic chapters examining eight separate areas related to soft war. Not surprisingly, some chapters make their case much more strongly than others, but together they make for provocative and interesting reading.

Although the quality of individual chapters is uneven, the editors are sincere in their efforts to examine the role of ethics and rules in an area where currently all but none exist. The lineup of authors is impressive and includes such notables as Cécile Fabre of All Souls College, Oxford University; Joy Gordon of Loyola University; and George R. Lucas, the recently appointed Vice

Admiral James B. Stockdale Professor of Ethics at the U.S. Naval War College.

Those who adhere to a traditional view of security, peace, and war will find many of their assumptions and beliefs challenged by *Soft War*. Concepts such as *jus ad vim* (the use of force short of war) raise questions about the sort of operations that would belong in this category and what, if any, ethical framework could be applied to these operations. One of the strengths of *Soft War* is the identification of operations conducted by both state and nonstate actors that do not meet the threshold of war but definitely are not peace.

The book’s introduction and first chapter suggest a new definition of war that is thought provoking and useful. Given that formally declared war apparently is passé, efforts to define just what the term *war* encompasses are overdue. For example, does the use of force against an opponent remain one of the prerequisites for moving from peace to war? Or can the effects of nonlethal actions produce outcomes so severe as to be considered an act of war?

The book’s strongest chapters are those dealing with subjects that are better known to the larger security profession. Authors of these chapters tend to produce the best arguments and convincing conclusions. For example, chapter 7, “State-Sponsored Hacktivism and the Rise of ‘Soft’ War” by George Lucas, is excellent. The other chapters in this section on cyber warfare, media warfare, and lawfare are also among the best in the book.

That said, editorial sincerity and several excellent chapters likely will not convince traditional security professionals to support applying the LOAC as a

guide to dealing with these emerging threats. Whether *soft war* is actually *war* still remains up for debate, despite *Soft War*'s well-crafted arguments.

Having examined cyber war, media war, and lawfare, *Soft War* takes on the general category of *nonviolence*, and the more-specific questions of hostage taking and prisoners. One of the more-provocative chapters examines the use of unarmed bodyguards. This title applies primarily to unarmed civilians performing the role of peacekeepers without UN authorization. Some readers will be surprised to learn that some small-scale operations of this nature have been undertaken, but no reader should be surprised at the complications deriving from attempts to conduct such operations on a much broader scale. Even more surprising is the argument that under some circumstances, civilians might be conscripted, morally and legally, to conduct such an operation.

Soft War's concluding chapter, "Proportionate Self-defense in Unarmed Conflict" by Michael Gross, is not a summation of the book's content but a separate piece of scholarship that stands on its own merit. Gross discusses appropriate responses to sanctions, lawfare, and cyber warfare/terrorism, and he also identifies and examines some of the very significant challenges in constructing a valid response to unarmed attacks. His conclusion that "soft war poses an abiding challenge for just war theory" (p. 232) is somewhat anticlimactic; for all that, it is defensible.

In the end, *Soft War* is much more an invitation to a conversation than it is a set of ready-to-use solutions. It does raise questions to which, so far, there are no answers. It proposes solutions, some

of which are likely to create additional and potentially worse problems. Its contributors do not hesitate to challenge status quo thinking and deliver new perspectives. Perhaps most importantly, this book recognizes that ethical considerations must be part of operations in the gray area between peace and war and that the time to identify tools and guidelines for resolving those associated ethical issues is now.

RICHARD J. NORTON



Patton's Way: A Radical Theory of War, by James Kelly Morningstar. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017. 352 pages. \$35.

When most people think of General George S. Patton Jr., USA—even people who should know better—they tend to confuse him with George C. Scott, the actor who played him in the 1970 movie *Patton*. In many ways, that is a tribute to Scott's acting and the power of film in contemporary society, but there is a reason the motion picture was made in the first place: Patton was an exceptionally good general who got results.

James Kelly Morningstar reminds us of that fact in this powerful and significant account of Patton's approach to war fighting. Much of Patton's unique approach to combat operations has been obscured by a number of factors. He died soon after the war, which allowed other Allied generals to offer accounts in the form of interviews, speeches, and memoirs that emphasized their contributions and, in turn, downplayed those of Patton. In addition, many people, including historians and army officers studying his battles, did not understand or appreciate fully his approach, and