The DoD *Law of War Manual* and its Critics: Some Observations

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I. Introduction

When the Department of Defense (DoD) issued its Law of War Manual in June of 2015—an effort decades in the making—it is clear that it anticipated criticism. For an organization not especially disposed to be humble about its accomplishments, it made a surprising invitation in the text for “comments and suggestions.” Several experts (and other pundits) have taken up...
that offer, and have done so publically. Indeed, two major national/international security law-focused blogs, *Just Security*³ and *Lawfare*,⁴ created sections within their websites devoted to the *Manual*.

Many observers had been concerned about what the final product might look like. Hays Parks, the now-retired Marine and long-time DoD lawyer whom most experts consider to be his generation’s dean of law of war specialists, shepherded the project for almost three quarters of its two-decade development, and had expected it to be fielded sometime in 2010.⁵ However, progress on the *Manual* was abruptly halted that year when the Department of Defense decided to re-engage the inter-agency process, reportedly in deference to some political appointees in the Obama Administration who “aggressively sought changes in the DoD Manual to conform to their political philosophies or legal arguments in detainee litigation.”⁶ This led to fears by Parks and others that the final document would be mired in politics and reflect incorrect interpretations of the law that could “endanger the lives of [U.S.] fighting men and women.”⁷

Those fears appear to have been largely avoided in the *Manual*, notwithstanding other criticisms that have arisen. The purpose of this article is to examine some of those critiques, and to offer, where appropriate, counters to those assessments, as well as suggestions as to how the *Manual* might be improved. Although this article does not purport to be a comprehensive examination of every aspect of the *Manual* or, for that matter, a response to every criticism that has been lodged against it, I nevertheless conclude that on balance the *Manual* provides an excellent, comprehensive and much-needed statement of the U.S. Department of Defense’s view of

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⁷. *Id.*
the *lex lata* of the law of war. Consequently, with a few exceptions, what follows is generally a defense of the *Manual* pertaining to several issues that have proven to be contentious.

## II. HUMAN SHIELDS

One of the most energetic and derisive of the *Manual*’s early critics is Professor Adil Ahmad Haque of Rutgers Law School. Just weeks after its release, he alleged on the *Just Security* blog that based on his reading of the text, the DoD “apparently thinks that it may lawfully kill an unlimited number of civilians forced to serve as involuntary human shields in order to achieve even a trivial military advantage.”

I responded by arguing a number of points, beginning by dismissing Haque’s interpretation of what he thinks the *Manual* asserts. What the *Manual* actually says about human shields is to repeatedly make the point that using them is prohibited by international law. It reflects the indisputable axiom that “civilians must not be used as shields or as hostages.” It further makes it clear that civilians, including human shields, must not be made the object of an attack.

Importantly, contrary to what Haque’s post suggests, the *Manual* does not exempt the U.S. military from the affirmative duty “to take feasible precautions to reduce the risk of harm to the civilian population and other protected persons and objects” and to incorporate such precautions “when planning and conducting” attacks. More specifically, the *Manual* insists that “wanton disregard for civilian casualties or harm to other protected persons and objects is clearly prohibited.”

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8. See, however, notes 151 and 152, *infra*, and accompanying text (arguing that the *Manual*, by its own terms, does not necessarily speak for the entire U.S. government).
12. See, e.g., DoD MANUAL, *infra* note 1, ¶¶ 2.5.3.3, 5.16.3, 10.5.1.4, 11.6.1.
13. Id. ¶ 5.3.2.
14. Id. ¶ 5.3.3.
15. Id. ¶ 5.3.3.2.
The Manual does recognize that “in some cases, a party to a conflict may attempt to use the presence or movement of the civilian population or individual civilians in order to shield military objectives from seizure or attack.”

It counsels however—and this is critical—that when “enemy persons engage in such behavior, commanders should continue to seek to discriminate in conducting attacks and to take feasible precautions to reduce the risk of harm to the civilian population and civilian objects”

Regarding, human shields in particular, the Manual states:

Harm to Human Shields. Use of human shields violates the rule that civilians may not be used to shield, favor, or impede military operations. The party that employs human shields in an attempt to shield military objectives from attack assumes responsibility for their injury, provided that the attacker takes feasible precautions in conducting its attack.

If the proportionality rule were interpreted to permit the use of human shields to prohibit attacks, such an interpretation would perversely encourage the use of human shields and allow violations by the defending force to increase the legal obligations on the attacking force.

So Haque’s overstated accusation is legally deficient as there are plenty of precautions aimed at protecting civilians memorialized in the Manual’s text. I also suggested that regardless of where one might stand on the Manual, should we not all be concerned that nowhere in his legal analysis does Haque even mention “feasible precautions” despite it being embedded (repeatedly) in the Manual as a legal requirement? I asked, rhetorically, is that not a pretty significant omission? And, of course, it is.

Haque dismisses DoD’s common-sense view that allowing unscrupulous defenders to succeed in deterring attacks through the use of human shields would “perversely encourage the use of human shields.” He contends that:

[Attacking combatants despite the presence of involuntary shields will not make those combatants any worse off than they would have been without those shields. On the contrary, if defending forces expect addi-

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16. *Id.* ¶ 5.5.4.
17. *Id.* (emphasis added).
18. *Id.* ¶ 5.12.3.3 (emphasis added).
tional (say, political) benefits and no additional costs from using involuntary shields then killing these involuntary shields will not deter their use.\textsuperscript{19}

If you accept this logic, then you are buying into the idea that even if targets come to accept that they will not be protected from attack by surrounding themselves with human shields, they will nevertheless continue to burden themselves by acquiring, guarding, feeding, housing and otherwise supporting human shields. Moreover, they will do so even though the very presence of human shields increases their “footprint” (and therefore their chances of being detected by a variety of surveillance capabilities), diminishes their own reputation for fearlessness, risks strategic “backfire,”\textsuperscript{20} hardens public opinion against them\textsuperscript{21} and can put them in conflict with religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{22} In truth, there are considerable costs to keeping human shields, especially under circumstances where they would not, in fact, actually constitute a shield.

Nevertheless, Haque speculates that targets still would perceive that they could “expect” additional “political” benefits from keeping human shields, presumably from propagandizing those who might be killed in strikes. This is wrong for two reasons: one, thanks to advances in technology, targets can no longer assume that simply being close to civilians will mean that civilians will die in an attack (consider that even though terrorists targeted in drone operations have tried to do just that, civilian casualties from drone strikes are actually rare these days\textsuperscript{23}); and, secondly, even when hostages are killed in attacks (as was the case in 2015), public support for such strikes remains strong despite concerns among the populace that the attacks could endanger the lives of innocent Americans.\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{19} Haque, \textit{The Defense Department’s Indefensible Position}, supra note 10.
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In his responses to my critique, Haque argues that I have a “utilitarian argument” as to the importance of avoiding incentivizing an enemy to use human shields.25 Not so, except perhaps to say I see great utility in not allowing the law of war (LoW) to incentivize activities that put civilians at risk. In my view one of the underlying purposes of the LoW is, as the Manual puts it, “protecting combatants, noncombatants, and civilians from unnecessary suffering,”26 and it should be interpreted towards that end. I disagree with Haque’s conclusion that the LoW mandates allowing a belligerent unimpeded use of human shields, subject only to some theoretical after-the-fact accountability for war crimes.

In fact, I believe it is not improper for an attacker to consider the protection of civilians as well as the importance of maintaining adherence to the LoW as part of the “definite military advantage sought” in conducting a proportionality analysis.27 Along this line, the Manual notes that the Final Report of the Persian Gulf War concluded that military advantage “is not restricted to tactical gains, but is linked to the full context of a war strategy, in this instance, the execution of the Coalition war plan for liberation of Kuwait.”28 Acting to preserve the LoW operates broadly as a strategy not just as a philosophical good, but also a very practical way to deny the enemy the ability to effectively use human shields as a method of warfare in its military operations. Doing so offers a definite military advantage to the attacker—not to mention civilians—over the longer term. Importantly, as the Manual makes clear, international law does not require that the “advantage” be “immedi-

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26. See, e.g., DO D MANUAL, supra note 1, ¶¶ 2.5.3.3, 5.16.3, 10.5.1.4, 11.6.1.
28. DO D MANUAL, supra note 1, ¶ 5.7.7.3 n.170.
ate," and that advantage is “not restricted to immediate tactical gains, but may be assessed in the full context of the war strategy.”

We can never forget that voluntary and involuntary human shields undermine the fundamental law of war principle of distinction and the protection of innocent civilians. The real issue is what works best to protect civilians? Here is where the Manual could be clearer. It would be better to explicitly point out that, as described above, when an attack is designed at least in part to deny an adversary the military advantage of using human shield as a method of warfare, that end constitutes a powerful strategic military advantage for the attacker to seek and is, therefore, quite significant in determine what might be feasible in the protection of civilians.

Subsequent to this colloquy, two more notable posts appeared on the Just Security blog about human shields. The first, with the very intriguing title Human Shields: Weapon of the Strong, is co-authored by Professor Neve Gordon, a political scientist at Ben-Gurion University, and Brown University anthropologist, Professor Nicola Perugini. In their essay they bring an extraordinarily useful interdisciplinary voice to the dialogue by critiquing both Haque and me by contending that we “both treat human shielding as an ahistorical phenomenon and therefore fail to address a much more fundamental question: Why does the Law of War Manual suddenly include clauses dealing with human shields?”

They argue that “human shielding is not a new phenomenon” and go on to propose an answer to their own question by saying:

29. Id., ¶ 5.7.7.3 (citing J. Fred Buzhardt, DoD General Counsel, Letter to Senator Edward Kennedy, Sept. 22, 1972, reprinted in 67 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW 122, 124 (1973)) (“Turning to the deficiencies in the Resolutions of the Institut de Droit International, and with the foregoing in view, it cannot be said that Paragraph 2, which refers to legal restraints that there must be an ‘immediate’ military advantage, reflects the law of armed conflict that has been adopted in the practices of States.”).

30. Id., ¶ 5.7.7.3. (footnote omitted) (citing CONDUCT OF THE PERSIAN GULF WAR: FINAL REPORT ON TO CONGRESS 613 (1982) (“Military advantage” is not restricted to tactical gains, but is linked to the full context of a war strategy, in this instance, the execution of the Coalition war plan for liberation of Kuwait.”). See also WILLIAM H. BOOTHBY, THE LAW OF TARGETING 189 n.70 (discussing the statement made by the UK in ratifying Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions); IAN HENDERSON, THE CONTEMPORARY LAW OF TARGETING 64 (2009).


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Our counterintuitive hypothesis is that human shields are not only being deployed as a weapon of the weak against high tech states (the underlying assumption of both Haque and Dunlap), but that the legal phrase “human shield” has also been mobilized by strong states to legitimate the increasing deaths of civilians on the battlefield.32

Gordon and Perugini, who sponsored a workshop on this subject,33 are certainly correct in that human shields have been used in the past. Yet frequency of a particular issue does matter when military manuals are being written. With respect to human shields, Professor Michael Schmitt in his work on the subject says the phenomenon is “endemic in contemporary conflict,”34 but also cites a quote from Jean Pictet’s 1958 commentaries on the Geneva Conventions, which said at that time that such instances were “fortunately rare.”35 Something rare in the past would logically and understandably be treated more extensively when it becomes “endemic” simply as a matter of military practicality as opposed to any nefarious reasons.

Regardless, military professionals and others who would use the Manual would likely not be surprised as to why it addresses the phenomenon in more detail than did previous documents. Previous use of human shields just did not prove to be the deterrent to attack that they have become today (this is likely why the instances were, in Pictet’s assessment, “rare”). Why the change? The truly unprecedented sensitivity to any civilian casualties that we see in current operations simply did not exist in earlier eras. And that sensitivity is not, particularly, because of new legal impediments, per se, but because of policy restraints much beyond what the LoW requires.

As I have discussed in War on the Rocks, the Obama Administration created—and publicized—policy standards for the use of force in counterterrorism operation outside of what it calls “areas of active hostilities” that demand not just a determination (as international law would have it) that the expected casualties not be “excessive” in relation to the anticipated military advantage, but rather a “near certainty” that no civilian casualties will

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32. Id.
35. COMMENTARY TO GENEVA CONVENTION IV RELATIVE TO THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIAN PERSONS IN TIME OF WAR 208 (Jean Pictet ed., 1958).
I observed in that essay that while human shields were “a serious violation of international law,” this was “hardly an impediment to al-Qaeda, especially if violating it might ensure policy-induced protection against airstrikes or other uses of force.”

Though the Administration said in the fall of 2014 that the restrictive policies would not apply to operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), it appears that equally limiting standards have nevertheless been in place.

Predictably, given the openly announced standards, today’s adversaries have concluded that using human shields will “work” because they assume—for understandable reasons—that the human shields will protect them from attack, or if they are attacked, to give them a propaganda windfall. As a Syrian activist recently put it, ISIS “uses civilians as human shields to claim that the U.S.-led coalition is targeting innocent people during the strikes.”

ISIS’s use of human shields is an expression of a version of what I call “lawfare,” whereby a party to a conflict creates the perception of illegality in order to serve a belligerent purpose. In other words, as opposed to Gor-


37. Id.

38. See Michael Isikoff, White House Exempts Syria Airstrikes from Tight Standards on Civilian Deaths, YAHOO NEWS (Sept. 30, 2014), http://news.yahoo.com/white-house-exempts-syria-airstrikes-from-tight-standards-on-civilian-deaths-183724795.html. However, recent news reports indicate that very tight standards are, in fact, being applied:

A senior American official said every air strike, whether conducted by a fighter jet or unmanned aeral vehicle, night or day, must be cleared by an American general officer. In order to strike a building it has to be determined that it is “sole use ISIS,” meaning there must be certainty that the enemy is not co-mingling there with civilians. “We aim for zero collateral damage,” said one young officer in the CJOC.


tion and Perugini’s interpretation of the discussion in the Manual, the use of human shields at various times in the past simply never developed into the reliably effective military tactic that needed to be addressed as it does today. The fact is that such abuse of civilians did not necessarily deter attackers in earlier eras, and the employers of human shields were vulnerable to having their own people treated similarly. It rarely worked then; it often works now.

Furthermore, the pervasiveness of twenty-first century information technologies simply did not exist in previous wars. Belligerents lacked the technical means to rapidly and effectively exploit the deaths of the human shields as easily as they can today. That reality, combined with the fact that in earlier eras human shields did not deter most attacks, can readily explain why human shields were not discussed as they are in the new Manual. Personally, I have never heard anyone—let alone a military professional—suggest anything remotely along the “legitimize civilian deaths” lines as Gordon and Perugini hypothesize.

This raises a further issue with Gordon’s and Perugini’s hypothesis: the complete absence of any evidence that indicates any sort of norm is arising demonstrating that the so called “strong States” have “mobilized” the human shields phenomenon to “legitimize the increasing deaths of civilians on the battlefield.” That said, Gordon and Perugini may be extrapolating from their view of Israel’s operations in Gaza to a supposition about “strong States” more generally.

At the risk of oversimplification, my sense is that Gordon and Perugini have concluded that Israel has essentially declared the entire area of Gaza as one where all civilians are being actively used as human shields. This characterization, they seem to contend, has allowed Israel not only to declare all civilian deaths as result of Israeli attacks the responsibility of the Hamas defenders for illegally using human shields, but also to permit Israel to relieve itself of the targeting precautions—to include any proportionality analysis—that the LoW would otherwise require in most circumstances. I do not read the DoD Manual as endorsing such a broad interpretation of human shielding, but I gather Gordon and Perugini do.

To be clear, I am not necessarily agreeing with what seems to be their interpretation of Israel’s use of force in Gaza, but if accurate, Israeli actions would be hard to square with the law. Rather, I believe that even if true, Israel’s actions are not themselves enough to establish an international norm vis-à-vis human shields. Personally, I view much of the legal aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian situation as sui generis, and of limited LoW application beyond its rather specific and unique circumstances.

In any event, the United States has instituted policies—as wrongheaded (albeit well-intended) as they may be—that is, aimed at the quixotic goal of a “near certainty” of zero civilian deaths, not any “legitimization” of them. These overly restrictive policies—expressed in rules of engagement—have actually inhibited the application of force against, for example ISIS, that would otherwise be permitted by international law.

Moreover, it has always been the case since 9/11 that the vast majority of civilian casualties have not been caused by “strong States.” To the contrary, it is adversaries whose disregard for international law typically goes beyond merely the unlawful use of human shields that are overwhelmingly responsible. For example, in its August 2015 report about civilian deaths in Afghanistan, the UN “documented a 78 per cent increase in civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements from complex and suicide attacks and a 57 per cent increase in civilian casualties from targeted kill-

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43. See, e.g., John Hayward, Impossible Rules of Engagement: “Zero Civilian Casualties” in ISIS Battle, BREITBART (June 24, 2015). In addition, consider:

In Iraq and Syria today, the US operates under a zero civilian casualty standard that far exceed the standards of international law. That policy is backfiring—it is extending the time to secure military objectives; allows more time for the Islamic State to commit atrocities; more radical Islamists to emerge out of Syria; and it yields the Islamic State the equivalent of an air defense capability they do not have to pay for, equip, or man to employ. Moreover, this excessive caution is sparking a crisis in confidence that has invited further violence emboldening others to take action not aligned with US interests. Russian intervention in Syria is an obvious example, and the attacks in Paris are the most recent manifestation of a timid and feckless coalition strategy.

ings.”44 The UN also “attributed 94 per cent of all civilian casualties from targeted killings to Anti-Government Elements.”45

The facts are glaringly inapposite of Gordon’s and Perugini’s contents, and just do not support the idea that the United States as a “strong State” is responsible for “increasing deaths of civilians on the battlefield.”46 Indeed, as grim as the statistics are, they serve as an empirical counterpoint to any supposed American effort at “legitimization” of civilian causalities. Indeed, it is evidence that the view of human shields as reflected in the Manual is not interpreted or used by U.S. forces to accomplish the nefarious end Gordon and Perugini allege, notwithstanding whatever may be the case with the Israelis.

The second of the new postings on this topic was by Haque himself.47 While he applauded Gordon and Perugini’s essay, he went on to speculate that the current Manual approach to human shields is somehow sourced in a 1990 law review article authored by Hays Parks, the renowned LoW expert I mentioned above.48 Suffice to say, absent explicit evidence linking him to the Manual’s construct, I would not conclude that Parks—who retired from the government in 2010 and who has declined to read the Manual—had anything to do with drafting this section of it (even assuming Haque is correct in his analysis of the Parks article).49 As I have pointed out elsewhere,50 the language to which he objects comes from a 1991 State Department response to the International Committee of the Red Cross

44. To be clear, of the total civilian deaths, 70 percent were caused by antigovernment elements, 16 percent by pro-government forces, 10 percent unattributed and 4 percent other. See UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan & UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Afghanistan Mid-Year Report 2015: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 3 (Aug. 2015), http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/AF/UNAMA_Protection_of_Civilians_in_Armed_Conflict_Midyear_Report_2015.docx.

45. Id. at 8.


48. Id. The article to which Haque refers is W. Hays Parks, Air War and the Law of War, 32 AIR FORCE LAW REVIEW 1 (1990).

49. Parks’ article is cited elsewhere in the Manual. I would not conclude that the current construct is his invention. See DO DEMANAL, supra note 1, ¶ 15.5.4 n.85.

(ICRC). Unless Parks or the Manual drafters state otherwise, Haque’s contention remains in the realm of imagination.

Haque also claims that the Manual’s “position” is that “civilians forced to serve as human shields can never render an attack unlawfully disproportionate, no matter how great the expected harm to those civilians or how small the anticipated military advantage.”51 Yet nowhere does he cite any text that actually states this alleged “position.” More importantly, it diametrically conflicts with the Manual’s many statements requiring attackers—including where human shields are involved—to use all feasible precautions to prevent harm to civilians.52

Allow me to clarify my construct for the Manual’s view of human shields that considers the proportionality analysis certainly differently than Haque, but perhaps even differently that the Manual drafters. Briefly, I suggest that where the object of an attack is the military force employing human shields, and the military necessity53 for doing so rests not so much on the desire to halt the use of human shields because it is an inhuman and illegal action, per se, but rather because the use of human shields has become in a given conflict a regularized, explicit and effective method of warfare for a particular enemy, the calculus necessarily changes, and perhaps even dramatically so.54

Consequently, the proportionality analysis as to what might be excessive in order to achieve that specific anticipated military advantage (that is, halting the enemy’s use of a tactic that may have shown real success in discouraging the use of force against them), would fit within that extant mandate of the Manual to do everything “feasible” to avoid harm to human shields. Put another way, given the military purpose involved, the proportionality calculation could be quite different as to what it may take to end the military utility of using human shields—as well as what would be “feasible” under those circumstances to protect them.55 In short, the assessment

51. Haque, Human Shields in the DOD Manual, supra note 47.
52. See, e.g., DoD MANUAL, supra note 1, ¶ 5.12.3.3.
54. Cf. Boothby, supra note 30, at 137 (“[T]he proportionality assessment must still be undertaken in cases where there are involuntary human shields in the vicinity of intended target of the attack, the better view is that the increased numbers of expected civilian casualties will not necessarily be excessive given the deliberate placing of civilians there.”) (citations omitted).
55. Id.
must necessarily take into account the atypical circumstance where the use of civilians as human shields intensifies into a significant military advantage for an unscrupulous defender. If the utility of human shields—and the consequent risk to civilians—is to be blunted, it needs to be unambiguously established militarily that the use of human shields will not, in fact, prevent an attack on any forces employing them.

This approach is related to the concept of reprisal, but not conterminous with it. Obviously, it does not involve—or permit—targeting human shields directly, but it also does not depend upon determining whether the human shields are truly voluntary or not—something that may be a practical impossibility, especially with respect to aerial attacks. Causing an adversary to abandon this method of warfare can produce a concrete and direct military advantage that also serves to protect civilians who might otherwise be employed as human shields were the tactic allowed to be effective.

There are, however, much more orthodox explanations for the Manual’s approach, and that is the time-honored norm of international law that there are certain categories of persons—munitions workers for example—whose proximity to an otherwise legitimate target is “understood not to prohibit attacks under the proportionality rule.” Specifically, the Manual restates the long-standing U.S. view that a “party that employs human shields in an attempt to shield military objectives from attack assumes responsibility for their injury, provided that the attacker takes feasible precautions in conducting its attack.”

Understandably, one might want to distinguish (as this writer would like to do) between voluntary and involuntary human shields, but the chaos of battlefield reality is such that delineations among civilians are not any more feasible to make than would be the case with voluntary/involuntary munitions workers. It is also important to recall with respect to voluntariness, the LoW—as Butch Bracknell recently noted—makes no exception for non-volunteers conscripted into a belligerent’s armed forces. They are subject to targeting under the LoW simply because of their status, even if it could be conclusively shown that their military service is involuntary.

56. DoD Manual, supra note 1, ¶ 5.12.3.2.
57. Id., ¶ 5.12.3.3.
Still, under the LoW does an involuntary civilian human shield have distinct individual rights independent of the behavior of belligerents? No, that is simply not how the lex specialis of the LoW works as it mainly concerns parties to a conflict, not the private rights of individuals. Even if the LoW was somehow rejiggered to be individual human rights-centric, it is not clear that the apparently preferred outcome of Haque, Gordon and Perugini for human shields would result. One would also have to consider the individual human rights of combatants to live, not to mention the rights of civilians who would be imperiled by the continued unrestrained use of human shields.

Moreover, critics seem to want a LoW rule that would, in effect, permit a clever and unprincipled adversary with access to enough human shields to create a legal “fortress” around all or a significant part of his critical military capability where virtually any attack would be legally prohibited. To reward a belligerent for flouting the LoW in that way is flatly contrary to the principle of international law expressed in the axiom ex injuria non jus oritur or “legal rights should not be understood to result from the commission of wrongful acts.”

This does not mean, as Gordon and Perugini seem to fear, that the entire battlespace can be transformed into an area where the normal proportionality rules and other precautions do not apply irrespective of the actual location of specific military capabilities. Rather, it is to simply make the point that proliferate use of illegal human shields in a militarily significant way cannot be allowed to create a force of legally protected military objects that cannot be otherwise effectively struck. In this context, the “feasibility” determination would take into account how militarily important and effective the enemy’s use of human shields has become. If their use is sporadic, and the impact is only minimal in a particular situation, the “feasibility” requirement may markedly limit an attack or even bar it altogether.

This axiom is particularly relevant here because the critics do not offer any option for militaries confronted with the systematized use of human shields as a method of war except to expect them to accept whatever setbacks and even defeats that the illicit tactic can produce. This illegality is different from many other violations of the LoW such as, for example, the infliction of unnecessary suffering on combatants or even the targeting of civilians because it is aimed at achieving a definite and concrete military advantage, that is, the protection of military objects, via an illicit method.
International law recognizes that States will not accept tactical or, especially, strategic defeat because of some legal construct that allows a lawbreaker to use with impunity a criminal means to achieve victory over them.

More generally, the law understands that at the end of the day, even uniquely unpalatable and undesired actions may nevertheless be required. A form of this concept, I would argue, underlayds the International Court of Justice’s opinion in the Nuclear Weapons case wherein the Court spent considerable time decrying the weapons but finally concluded that they could not say their use, as horrific as it might be, would be illegal under extreme circumstances.\(^59\)

Of course, this is not to imply that the use of human shields would typically engage the exigencies of nuclear weapons use, but it does illustrate the importance of international law—and especially the LoW—remaining workable and sensible to law-abiding nations. A good example is how the 1936 London Charter\(^60\) regarding submarine warfare proved impractical in combat, and has been subsequently interpreted (not without some controversy) in a way that honorable nations are not disadvantaged.\(^61\) Given that the law has proven almost totally impotent in restraining today’s adversaries who routinely violate LoW in exquisitely barbaric ways, we should be very sensitive to—and resistant of—any reading of the LoW that seems to result in privileging such lawbreakers because of their lawbreaking. To do so would invite the unravelling of the LoW regime if States conclude it produces such anomalous—and dangerous—results.

There is no doubt that human shields represent a devilishly complicated issue with no perfect answers. In many, or most, cases a commander would not, for policy reasons, conduct an attack where human shields of any type exist. But the Manual principally aims not to make fact-dependent policy decisions, but rather to describe what existing law permits.

We already live in a world where the worst belligerents exhibit a stunning contempt for the LoW, and the Manual—very wisely in my judgment—avoids incentivizing their use of human shields, something that would be the inevitable result of the adoption of Haque’s view, as well as

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that of Gordon and Perugini. It is imperative that the LoW not be allowed to be manipulated by criminals so as to give *de facto* immunity to their military objectives. Such a situation would leave the fate of civilians to monsters whose very use of human shields clearly illustrates their gross indifference to human life.

III. **Precautions in Attack**

Professor Haque and I also clashed over his critique of the Manual’s admittedly unartful reading of Article 57(3) of Additional Protocol 1 of the Geneva Conventions (AP I) (to which the United States is not a party). It deals with precautions commanders must take before attacking in order to avoid unnecessary harm to civilians. According to Haque, this Manual provision, which he seems to understand as a total rejection of the essence of Article 57(3), is “both legally and morally unsustainable.” His interpretation is one that the ICRC does not seem to share, but more about that in a minute.

In my response, entitled *Let’s Balance the Argument about the DOD Law of War Manual and Targeting*, I began by inviting readers to look at the provision of the Additional Protocol so they may make their own judgment. The text of Article 57(3) provides:

*When a choice is possible* between several military objectives for obtaining a similar military advantage, the objective to be selected shall be that the attack on which may be expected to cause the least danger to civilian lives and to civilian objects.

Here is what the Manual says about that provision:

AP I provides that “[w]hen a choice is possible between several military objectives for obtaining a similar military advantage, the objective to be selected shall be that the attack on which may be expected to cause the least danger to civilian lives and to civilian objects.” The United States has

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64. Dunlap, *Let’s Balance the Argument, supra* note 50. This section is largely taken from that post.
expressed the view that *this rule is not a requirement of customary international law*.\(^6\)

With respect to the last sentence, the *Manual* provides a footnote that says in substance:

> Paragraph 4B(4) contains the language of Article 57(3) of Protocol I, and is not a part of customary law. The provision applies “when a choice is possible . . .,” it is not mandatory. An attacker may comply with it if it is possible to do so, subject to mission accomplishment and allowable risk, or he may determine that it is impossible to make such a determination.\(^7\)

Haque considers this citation to be a mere “Army statement” (perhaps because of a misleading footnote in the ICRC customary law study\(^6\)), but it is actually from the *Digest of United States Practice in International Law 1991–1999*.\(^9\) According to the State Department, the Digest is intended to “provide the public with a historical record of the views and practice of the Government of the United States in public and private international law.”\(^7\)

This particular extract is from a January 11, 1991 telegram sent in response to a December 1990 memo that the ICRC distributed (to nations who might participate in the then pending Gulf war conflict) about the applicability of what the ICRC terms “International Humanitarian Law.”

In short, the position Haque criticizes is not a recent invention of DoD or the Army, but rather has been the view of the U.S. government for almost twenty-five years. Equally importantly, consider how the ICRC interprets the U.S. position in its study of customary international law:

**Interpretation**

The United States has emphasized that the obligation to select an objective the attack on which may be expected to cause the least danger to civilian

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66. *DoD MANUAL*, supra note 1, ¶ 5.11.5 (emphasis added).
67. *Id.*, ¶ 5.11.5 n.303 (emphasis added).
68. 1 *CUSTOMARY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW* 67 (Jean-Marie Henckaerts & Louise Doswald-Beck eds., 2005) [hereinafter CIHL Study].
lives and to civilian objects is not an absolute obligation, as it only applies “when a choice is possible” and thus “an attacker may comply with it if it is possible to do so, subject to mission accomplishment and allowable risk, or he may determine that it is impossible to make such a determination.”

In other words, the ICRC does not relate the U.S. view as a wholesale rejection of the “obligation” but says that the view is merely an interpretation explicating the precise circumstances in which it applies, that is, “when a choice is possible.” While the United States had—and continues to have—many objections to the ICRC study, this particular rendition of the U.S. view has not drawn complaints from the U.S. government.

You be the judge, but I do not think that the U.S. common-sense interpretation is “legally and morally unsustainable,” and my bet is that others would agree. In fact, this may be why it has not generated much in the way of criticism over the years. The interpretation reflects, I would suggest, a keen understanding of the realities of war and hard experience in the importance of clarity about something that could easily be misunderstood (as it seems, Haque has done).

However, what may be a bona fide criticism of the Manual is that the ICRC interpretation may be a clearer and better explanation of the U.S. position, and ought to be considered for adoption in the next iteration of the Manual.

IV. MORALITY, HONOR, AND THE COLLAPSE OF RECIPROCITY

As can already be seen, part of my sparring with Professor Haque over human shields and targeting drifted into my objection to his characterization of various Manual provisions as “morally unintelligible,” and to the charge that the assessments of the Manual's drafters had “no obvious basis” in “morality.” I saw these remarks as ad hominem attacks on those who

71. CIHL Study, supra note 68, at 67 (emphasis added).
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take a different view as to how to accomplish what seems to be the same end sought by Haque: the protection of civilians.75

Haque countered by insisting that “nowhere in [his] post [does he] question the character of the DoD Manual’s authors. [He says that he is] sure that they are fine people. Instead, [he] question[s] the soundness of the DoD Manual’s position.”76 When I answered by saying that you could not separate an attack on the morality of a position, from an attack on the author of it,77 he responded with a number of contentions, including the view that “[i]f morality were subjective—an expression of each individual’s emotions or preferences—then, indeed, all moral disagreement would be an exchange of personal attacks. However, morality is not subjective but objective, not an expression of how we feel but a reflection of how things are.”78

Still, Haque’s reference to morality is a worthy concern, and one in which I do find some of common ground with him when evaluated in a slightly different context. Regarding that context, consider the implications of what Creighton Professor Sean Watts calls a “significant recalibration” of law of war principles in the Manual, and one that “signals a return to very broad, generally applicable legal principles in a truer sense.”79 Specifically, Watts is assessing the fact that while there have been several different listings of such principles over the years, the Manual settles upon “three interdependent principles—military necessity, humanity, and honor—as providing the foundation for other law of war principles, such as proportionality and distinction, and most of the treaty and customary rules of the law of war.”80

To Watts, the inclusion of “humanity” is “perhaps its most drastic adjustment to existing doctrine.”81 He considers that the Manual’s “notion of humanity abandons recent refinements of that concept in favor of a more general approach.” But what he finds “most surprising” is the Manual’s “revival of the principle of honor” (which he uses, as the Manual does, in-

76. Haque, Human Shields and Proportionality, supra note 25.
77. Dunlap, Let’s Balance the Argument, supra note 50.
78. Adil Ahmad Haque, DOD is Still Wrong about Target Selection and Civilians, JUST SECURITY (July 15, 2015), https://www.justsecurity.org/24671/dod-wrong-target-selection-civilians/.
80. DoD MANUAL, supra note 1, ¶ 2.1.
81. Watts, supra note 79.
terchangeably with chivalry). Watts says the Manual “sketches honor in exceedingly broad terms and applies it to an extensive range of battlefield conduct,” but questions the “practical utility of the principle.”

Professor Rachel VanLandingham has a harsher assessment saying she has a “visceral negative reaction” to the Manual’s “emphasis on honor and chivalry.” In her mind they are “outdated, chauvinistic, and frankly distasteful concepts.” She also thinks that chivalry “connotes chauvinism, elitism, and the inhumanity of the Crusades,” adding that “codes of honor” signal “the assumed white, western, Christian superiority of the [era of the Crusades].”

While some elements of chivalry may have indeed had chauvinistic connotations, modern concepts of battlefield honor can and do draw from a broader and deeper moral source that underpins the law of war. Professor Terry Gill of the University of Amsterdam and the Netherlands Defence Academy relates:

Chivalry and martial honour have long been regarded as essential components of warrior ethics and military tradition. They are reflected in most cultures in one way or another, ranging from Western warrior tradition dating back to classic antiquity and medieval chivalry, to the various warrior codes of the ancient and medieval Near East, India, China and Japan. They also were practiced in various forms by many other cultures outside the arc of Eurasian/Mediterranean civilisation, including Native Americans and warrior peoples in Africa and the Pacific.

Michael Ignatieff makes a similar point in his classic book The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience where he notes that modern law of war conventions “drew upon a deeper moral source—the codes of a warrior’s honor.” Ignatieff explains that

82. Id.
83. Id.
85. Id.
86. Id.
Warrior’s honor was both a code of belonging and an ethic of responsibility. Wherever the art of war was practiced, warriors distinguished between combatants and noncombatants, legitimate and illegitimate targets, moral and immoral weaponry, civilized and barbarous usage in the treatment of prisoners and of the wounded. Such codes may have been honored as often in the breach as in the observance, but without them war is not war—it is no more than slaughter.89

Contrary to Watt’s bemusement about the inclusion of honor/chivalry in the Manual, and VanLandinghams’s apparent revulsion of it, I find real wisdom in what the Manual’s drafters have done. My reasoning is that doing so might help address the vacuum occasioned by the near disappearance of what was once a key supporting pillar of the law of war—reciprocity—from the kinds of conflicts in which military forces find themselves these days. Indeed, Watts and Vanlandingham both allude to today’s phenomenon of belligerents who make it part of their way of fighting to flaunt non-adherence to the law of war. Witness ISIS’s horrific burning of a captive Jordanian pilot,90 and even more appalling, the crucifixion of children and their burial of them alive.91

The increasing irrelevance in practical terms of the concept of reciprocity should be of no small concern to advocates of the rule of law in war. Professor Ken Anderson of American University warned not long ago that “[o]bligation without reciprocity risks breakdown [of the rules of war] even faster where one side is pressed to protect the civilians of both sides put at risk because that’s how the other side deliberately wages war, not merely from indifference to them.”92 What is more, Anderson ominously predicts that in such circumstances:

A system of formal reciprocity in the rules of war (each side has the same formal obligations), but also independence of obligation to the rules of war (each side’s obligation is independent of what the other side does, in-

89. Id. at 117.
cluding if the other side violates the rules) over time is likely either to rup-
ture in crisis or else simply have less and less purchase as universal rules.\(^93\)

Although the Manual still talks gamely of reciprocity,\(^94\) it is doubtful that many American troops battling today’s depraved foes expect to be treated by them as international law would require. How then do commanders and their lawyers rationalize lawful behavior to the troops? Can fear of punish-
ment alone do the job? Maybe in some cases, but reinforcing the idea of honor and chivalry, which implicitly call upon the individual to do the right thing even when the enemy is not, can be an important motivator in modern war.

I believe that this is how Haque’s insistent reference to morality, which I see as involving honor and chivalry, can best be productively operational-
ized. Although I continue to disagree with how he expresses it at times, his underlying concept (as I interpret it anyway) that morality “matters” is more than just a philosophical good, but also a practical necessity if we are to expect the troops to adhere to the law under circumstances of extreme stress in the face of an adversary who cruelly mocks the most basic principles of the law of war.

Translating morality, \textit{qua} morality, into more secular references to honor and chivalry may be a way to broadly and effectively access the warfighter’s psychology that one wishes to animate towards law of war compliance.

\section*{V. JOURNALISTS}

Whatever consternation was produced by any other part of the Manual, nothing resulted in more outcry from the Fourth Estate than its references to journalists, and to the possibility that circumstances exist where they might be considered spies or belligerents. In a breathless editorial—\textit{The Pentagon’s Dangerous Views on the Wartime Press—The New York Times} typified criticism by claiming that the Manual would make the work of journalists “more dangerous, cumbersome and subject to censorship,” demanding that its provisions relating to the “treatment of journalists covering armed conflicts . . . should be repealed immediately."\(^95\)

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\begin{itemize}
\item \(^93\) \textit{Id.}
\item \(^94\) See, e.g., \textsc{DoD Manual}, supra note 1, ¶ 3.6.
\end{itemize}
While the Pentagon\textsuperscript{96} offered a strong defense of this part of the Manual, as did others,\textsuperscript{97} I found the Times’ deeply-flawed and at times nonsensical editorial to unintentionally demonstrate why the public has so little confidence in newspapers these days, particularly when compared to its confidence in the military.\textsuperscript{98} Indeed, Americans’ trust in the media generally remains at “historical lows.”\textsuperscript{99} Though the Times itself seems to struggle with why this may be,\textsuperscript{100} the truth is that this editorial is an example of why people rightly are skeptical of the media’s ability to get things right.

In this instance, the Manual lays out the various legal statuses that might attach to journalists by saying: “[i]n general, journalists are civilians. However, journalists may be members of the armed forces, persons authorized to accompany the armed forces, or unprivileged belligerents.”\textsuperscript{101} It emphasizes that journalists “are regarded as civilians; i.e., journalism does not constitute taking a direct part in hostilities such that such a person would be deprived of protection from being made the object of attack.”\textsuperscript{102} However,

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\item \textsuperscript{98}Confidence in Institutions, GALLUP (June 2–7, 2015), http://www.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx.
\item \textsuperscript{99}Americans’ Trust in Media Remains at Historical Low, GALLUP (Sept. 28, 2015), http://www.gallup.com/poll/185927/americans-trust-media-remains-historical-law.aspx.
\item \textsuperscript{101}\textit{DoD Manual}, supra note 1, ¶ 4.24.
\item \textsuperscript{102}Id., ¶ 4.24.2.
\end{itemize}
it also acknowledges the inarguable truth that there are times when even journalists can lose their protection. Specifically, the *Manual* points out that:

Journalists and Spying. Reporting on military operations can be very similar to collecting intelligence or even spying. A journalist who acts as a spy may be subject to security measures and punished if captured. To avoid being mistaken for spies, journalists should act openly and with the permission of relevant authorities. Presenting identification documents, such as the identification card issued to authorized war correspondents or other appropriate identification, may help journalists avoid being mistaken as spies.\(^\text{103}\)

As I pointed out in an op-ed, *The New York Times, Dangerously Uninformed, vs. the Military*,\(^\text{104}\) the *Times* is apparently unaware that the *Manual* does little more than lay out what the Geneva Conventions and other legal authorities have provided for decades. For example, the *Times*’ editors decry the fact that the *Manual* notes that when journalists relay to adversaries “information of immediate use in combat operations,” such real-time and direct support of enemy warfighting efforts might jeopardize the protected status journalists normally enjoy.\(^\text{105}\) This is nothing new. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) makes clear that journalists are protected like other civilians,\(^\text{106}\) but not “for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities”—language which is itself taken directly from the 1977 Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions.\(^\text{107}\)

So what would constitute direct participation for a journalist? The *Times* ridicules the *Manual* for having what it calls a “vaguely-worded standard” in this regard.\(^\text{108}\) Actually, the ICRC itself uses “transmitting tactical targeting

\(^{103}\) Id., ¶ 4.24.4.


\(^{105}\) *The Pentagon’s Dangerous Views on the Wartime Press*, supra note 95.


\(^{107}\) Protocol I, supra note 27, art. 51(3).

\(^{108}\) *The Pentagon’s Dangerous Views on the Wartime Press*, supra note 95.
intelligence for a specific attack” as one example of direct participation.\textsuperscript{109} Put another way, the Manual’s illustration virtually mirrors the substance of the ICRC’s assessment—something the Times could have easily discovered if they had exercised a modicum of due diligence.

One has to wonder whether anyone (other than the Times’ editors) really believes that journalists have some kind of unfettered right to broadcast to ISIS militants or whomever might be listening that, for example, a clandestine military operation to rescue human shields is about to get underway?

The Times also obviously resents that anyone would even suggest that a journalist might be involved in spying. In truth, it is hardly a news flash\textsuperscript{110} that spies have long used the “journalist” sobriquet as a cover.\textsuperscript{111} In fact, in reporting the death in 2013 of Austin Goodrich, a former CBS reporter-cum-spy, the Times itself admits that he was “far from the only journalist doubling as a secret agent” in the 1950s and 1960s.\textsuperscript{112} Is the Times really so naive to think that in today’s world where adversaries are willing to bury children alive,\textsuperscript{113} they would be squeamish about using journalists as secret agents?

It is not hard to figure out why journalists could be effective spies. After all, international law defines spying as “when [someone] acting clandestinely or on false pretenses . . . obtains or endeavors to obtain information in the zone of operations of a belligerent . . . with the intention of communicating it to the hostile party.”\textsuperscript{114} Is not a journalist someone who “obtains or endeavors to obtain information in the zone of operations”? For its part, the American Press Institute (API) defines journalism as “the activity of gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news and infor-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} RICHARD A. BEST, JR., CONG. RESEARCH SERV., RL33715, COVERT ACTION: AN EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY? (1996).
\item \textsuperscript{111} Murray Seeger, Spies and Journalists: Taking a Look at Their Intersections, NIEMAN REPORTS (Sept. 11, 2009), http://niemanreports.org/articles/spies-and-journalists-taking-a-look-at-their-intersections/.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Bruce Weber, Austin Goodrich, Spy Who Posed as Journalist, Dies at 87, NEW YORK TIMES, July 15, 2015, at A15.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Stephanie Nebehay, supra note 91.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, annexed to Convention No. IV Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, art. 29, Oct. 18, 1907, 36 Stat. 2227, T.S. No. 539.
\end{itemize}
One need not be a military expert to realize that the API definition reflects much the same skill set as that of a military intelligence officer. In short, the Manual’s concern about journalists is hardly unreasonable.

The ICRC understands that it is a real possibility that a journalist might actually be an intelligence operative, and simply insists that a journalist so suspected must not be subject to arbitrary detention, and must be given a fair trial. The Manual is, of course, fully supportive of such humane treatment.

In addition, the Times’ editorial reveals a blissful ignorance about the impact of modern technologies on battlefield reporting. A new study by the Royal Danish Defense College regarding the “weaponization of social media” gives examples as to how today’s press reporting is being exploited by terrorist organizations in combat:

Internet (live streamed news reports on web-TV) and social network media (e.g., Journalists tweeting from crisis areas) are also being used by non-state actors without sophisticated Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets to conduct Bomb Damage Assessment (BDA) of, e.g., their rocket attacks.

In other words, even the most well-meaning journalist might be inadvertently aiding the enemy. This illustrates that, yes, there are instances where it is necessary to temporarily restrain reporting—even by bona fide journalists. This is completely legal, and not just under international law: The U.S. Supreme Court has never found that the First Amendment entitles journalists or anyone else to communicate to the enemy real-time information it can readily use to fight U.S. troops.

Why? The court has held that it is “obvious and unarguable” that “no governmental interest is more compelling than the security of the Nation.” Indeed, in the 2010 case of Holder v. Humanitarian Law Project, the court upheld as consistent with the First Amendment the actual criminaliza-

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116. CIHL Study, supra note 68, at 118.
tion of the conveyance of relatively benign and unclassified legal information to designated terrorist organizations. 120

The Times also arrogates to itself the right to declare who is or is not a journalist. When a Pentagon official raised the example of the assassination of the Afghan military commander Ahmad Shah Massoud in September 2001 by assassins who posed as television journalists, the Times editors scoffed that “[t]hey were not, in fact, journalists.” 121 In the real world, however, determining who is or is not a journalist is not an easy thing, especially given that anyone with access to a social media can describe him or herself as a “citizen journalist.” 122 These are, we are told, private individuals who “do essentially what professional reporters do.” 123

Accordingly, although the Times objects mightily to a journalist accreditation process, should any “citizen journalist” with a Twitter account be allowed to traipse around a battlefield transmitting whatever sensitive military activity interests him or her? Furthermore, is not some vetting appropriate in light of the Massoud incident? Again, even a cursory examination of Additional Protocol I clearly shows that it contemplates that it will be a government—not the Times or any newspaper—that “attests” to a person’s “status as a journalist.” 124

I concluded my op-ed by observing that the United States needs a fully informed, robust and courageous media, particularly during wartime. And it needs reporters on the battlefield who are willing to accurately represent the facts to the public. The press, however, cannot deem itself above the Constitution or the international law to which America has bound itself. Nor can it be insensitive to the needs of those this country sends in harms’ way. Denigrating the military simply because its Manual reflects the law as it exists is a formula for the further loss of confidence of the American people in their newspapers and other journalistic endeavors.

121. The Pentagon’s Dangerous Views on the Wartime Press, supra note 95.
123. Id.
124. Protocol I, supra note 27, art. 79(3).
VI. Cyber

One of the most interesting sections of the Manual (and not the first time about which this writer is commenting) is Chapter 16 on Cyber Operations. What is remarkable is not so much anything dramatically new in the text, but rather that it was included at all. For many years, almost everything about cyber, other than that which related to purely defensive cyber matters, was classified; indeed, the Pentagon’s joint doctrine was only declassified in 2014. What discussion of the U.S. view of law in this area that existed in official venues was mainly based on a long-available 1999 U.S. Department of Defense General Counsel (GC) memorandum, and the ground-breaking 2012 speech by Harold Koh, then legal advisor to the U.S. State Department.

The Manual’s chapter on cyber operations hews to the earlier DoD memo and the Koh speech in virtually all particulars. Controversy may exist, however, in at least two areas. Specifically, the Manual diverges a bit from what many scholars believe is the proverbial “gold” standard, the highly respected Tallinn Manual (which it does not even cite). An effort of international experts, under the auspices of NATO’s Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, the Tallinn Manual attempts to capture and interpret the extant international law applicable to cyber.

To be sure, the Manual and the Tallinn Manual are in accord in many respects, but the two documents part ways on the issue of the degree of


129. THE TALLINN MANUAL ON INTERNATIONAL LAW APPLICABLE TO CYBER WARFARE (Michael N. Schmitt ed., 2013) [hereinafter TALLINN MANUAL].

force that is necessary to trigger the right of self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter. The Tallinn Manual takes the view of most international law scholars that the prohibition on the “use of force,” found in Article 2(4) of the Charter, is different from what might constitute an “armed attack” under Article 51. The Manual, however, takes the position—as reflected in the Koh speech—“that the inherent right of self-defense potentially applies against any illegal use of force.”

In addition, while traditionally an “armed attack” necessarily involved some degree of violence and destruction, the Manual suggests that this may not always be the case. Specifically, it uses as an example of a cyber operation that would “cripple a military’s logistics systems, and thus its ability to conduct and sustain military operations” as an incident that might be “considered a use of force under jus ad bellum.” Other scholars, like Schmitt, also seem to be acknowledging that significant cyber events may have an effect so severe that States will consider them the equivalent of an armed attack even in the absence of direct, physical destruction as is the case with more traditional weaponry, even though the boundaries may not be clear.

Schmitt says that “[s]hutting down the national economy is probably an act of war, but short of that, we’re not certain.”

Despite having been published since June of 2015, many pundits seem unaware of this chapter of the Manual. For example, in September of 2015, an op-ed appeared asserting that in cyber a “new battlefield has emerged


Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.

132. Id., art. 2(4). That article provides: “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”

133. DOD MANUAL, supra note 1, ¶¶ 1.11.5.2, 16.3.3.1.

134. Id., ¶ 16.3.1 (citations omitted).


136. Id.
that has anonymous combatants, civilian targets and no established rules.”  

Actually, as both the Manual and the Tallinn Manual make clear, there are rules, but ascertaining the facts by which to apply those rules can be difficult in the cyber arena. Still, as Schmitt concedes, circumstances can arise where the legal answers are not yet clear. This is especially true regarding hostile cyber incidents below the threshold of “force,” so we can expect further developments in future editions of the Manual.

Even more significant is a letter from several congressmen to the State Department insisting that “[n]ow is the time for the international community to seriously respond again with a binding set of international rules for cyberwarfare: an E-Neva Convention.”

Perhaps the issue is that although the Manual sketches out the DoD’s view of the law, it does not provide a “cookbook” setting out the legal status for every possible cyber incident. As Admiral Rogers pointed out in recent testimony, the DoD is still “still working [its] way through” what constitutes an “act of war” in a given situation. That is understandable, but even if the Manual never becomes a cookbook (as it never should be), it should be amended as more detailed guidance becomes available. In this respect, the Manual is more of a beginning, than a finished state of the U.S. view of the law of cyber operations.

VII. CONCLUSION

This short article by no means examined all of the Manual’s critiques, let alone all the thoughtful dialogue it engendered. For example, Army Reserve Major Patrick Walsh’s examination of the Manual led him to make an

interesting call to correct what he terms as a “major flaw” in the Uniform Code of Military Justice as he believes it has “no provision for command responsibility.”142 I am not sure I agree with him as Articles 18 and 21 of the Code do provide for courts-martial jurisdiction for violations of the “law of war,” which would include offenses related to command responsibility.143

Professor Jordan Paust points out that the Supreme Court has on more than one occasion concluded that Congress has included, in language very similar to that of the current Code, the authority to try offenses arising under the law of war.144 Accordingly, I think that with innovative charging, an appropriate law of war crime based on command responsibility can be pursued within the existing parameters of the Code.

Another interesting critique comes from the highly-respected law of war expert Professor Geoffrey Corn.145 Corn found it “perplexing” that the Manual did not elevate the LoW obligation “to take all feasible precautions to mitigate the risk to civilians” from a “mere rule” to “a fundamental principle” of the LoW. Candidly, it is not perplexing to me because while the Manual has shown some fresh thinking regarding precautions to be taken during attacks,146 it is still essentially a lex lata, as opposed to a lex feranda, document. His proposal is just not reflective of the vast majority of interpretations of the LoW’s fundamental principles.147 More specifically, it is hard to see how it might affect the actual practice of the LoW, except perhaps to obscure the point that it is “excessive” civilian casualties that the LoW focuses upon. In fact, in the current war against ISIS, credible reports...
about unwarranted caution about civilian casualties (that is, beyond what the LoW requires) “is sparking a crisis in confidence that has invited further violence emboldening others to take action not aligned with U.S. interests.”

Nevertheless, these essays and others are the sort of thought-provoking dialogue one hopes the Manual will produce. They suggest that the Manual will likely become something of a “living” document. As already noted, by its own terms it solicits feedback, and explicitly preserves the idea that the views it contains will evolve. As new weapons, new strategies and new adversaries emerge, we can—and should—expect to see just such an evolution. After all, as the Nuremberg Tribunal observed, the “law is not static, but by continual adaption follows the needs of a changing world.”

Still, it remains to be seen the degree to which the Manual influences the development of the law of war. Professor Eric Jensen of Brigham Young Law School expresses concern that the Manual officially bills itself as merely providing “information on the law of war to DOD personnel responsible for implementing the law of war and executing military operations,” instead of aggrandizing for itself a more directive mantle of definitive guidance. He also seems displeased that the Manual states that it “does not necessarily reflect the views of any other department or agency of the U.S. Government or the views of the U.S. Government as a whole” as this may undermine its value as opinio juris.

While Jensen’s criticisms are thoughtful and important, I think that the language that concerns him is simply bureaucratic conventions required to end the lengthy interagency coordination process that reportedly stalled the Manual’s publication for so long. I would expect that the Manual will rather quickly become considered the definitive statement of the United States on the LoW. Because the United States has so much practical experience in warfighting, and especially in the complex conflicts of the twenty-

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148. Deptula, supra note 43.
149. DOD MANUAL, supra note 1, ¶ 1.1.1 (“This manual does not, however, preclude the Department from subsequently changing its interpretation of the law.”).
152. Id. (citing DOD MANUAL, supra note 1, ¶ 1.1.1).
153. See supra notes 5, 6 and accompanying text.
first century, I would be surprised if other nations do not also find it to be the most influential document of its genre.

Allow me to close by paraphrasing what I said about another law of war manual\textsuperscript{154} because I believe it to be equally (or more) applicable here:

\textit{[E]fforts like the drafting of the [DoD] Manual are but one part of the overall preparation for lawful, ethical combat. The [DoD] Manual can be instrumental not just to protecting the lives of innocent civilians, or even to defending the perquisites of states, per se. It can also help to provide a degree of confidence, if not comfort, to those who are asked by their nation to perform the most difficult of tasks under the most demanding of circumstances. For this, if nothing else, the enormous effort that produced the [DoD] Manual finds its justification.}\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{154} The Program on Humanitarian and Conflict Research at Harvard University, \textsc{Manual on International Law Applicable to Air and Missile Warfare} (2013).

\textsuperscript{155} Charles J. Dunlap, Jr., \textit{Law of War Manuals and the Warfighting Perspective}, 47(2) \textsc{Texas International Law Journal} 276 (2012).