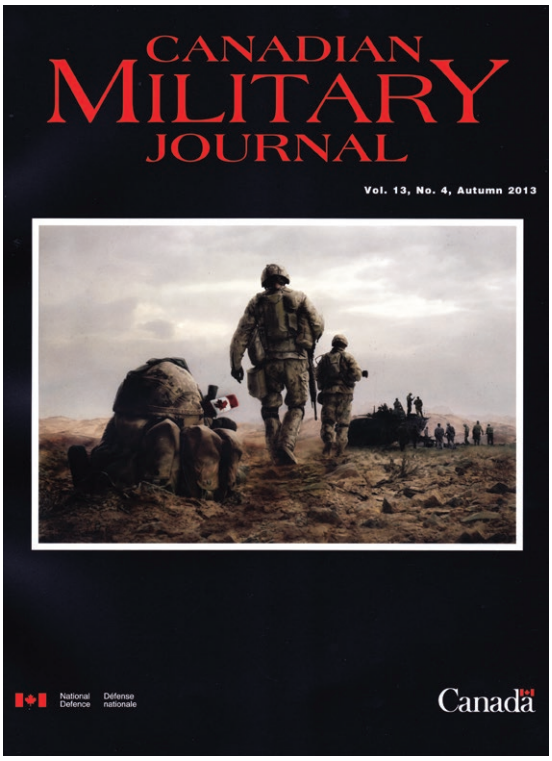
LETTER TO THE EDITOR



In Volume 13, Number 4 (Autumn 2013) of the *Canadian Military Journal,* Major Garrett Lawless argues that the nature of war has changed in the nuclear era. Indeed, he asserts that classic war between major powers is dead. He supports the argument for this fundamental change with several points, including by asserting that the 'new' result of war is certain extinction, and that the decision to go to war is based upon a militaristic culture. It appears that Major Lawless is arguing for a global utopia, where human beings have learned to live prosperously in a harmonious, interconnected, and liberal democratic global society. While I wish that Mr. Lawless was correct, I fear that all human history argues against him.

The nature of war (or why we fight wars) is a human condition that has not changed since the beginning of recorded human history. Thucydides concluded that human beings fight war for "fear, honour, and interest." However, the character of war (warfare, or how we fight wars) changes and reflects the strategic context of the times. Jan Bloch's conclusion that war was impossible was clearly wrong. However, predictions for changes in warfare accurately reflected the shift from pre-industrial to industrial society, and the associated impact upon warfare. But previous changes in warfare were all pre-nuclear era events. So, how do we assess the impact of the threat of certain extinction on the nature of war?

The nuclear era has seen conflict between nuclear-to-nuclear, nuclear-to-non-nuclear, and non-nuclear-to-non-nuclear states. While there have been no direct, unrestrained inter-state wars (similar to the First World War or the Second World War) between two nuclear capable nations, there continued to be wars that fall into the last two categories. The fear of Mutually Assured Destruction has also changed the character of war between two nuclear capable nations. The result is often proxy-war, or warfare lower on the spectrum of conflict. Thus far in the era of nuclear weapons, we are neither peaceful nor all dead.

Major Lawless also argues that encouraging (assisting?) certain countries to acquire nuclear weapons will reduce the possibility of war. Even if the last part of the statement is correct, the hard question remains: "Who is allowed to determine which nations are suitable recipients of nuclear proliferation aid"? The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons recognizes five states that possess nuclear weapons and has non-proliferation as its central goal. It concludes that *no* nations are suitable candidates for nuclear proliferation aid. Indeed, it can be concluded that if a nuclear capable nation extended overt nuclear aid to an affiliate nation, it is probable that an opposing nuclear capable nation would extend similar support to their proxy/ally. And the cycle continues. Perhaps this is not the best recipe for the end of war.

Finally, the argument that the decision to go to war is based upon a militaristic culture avoids the interdependent nature of war and warfare. Like dancing, war 'takes two to tango.' Even the most pacifist culture may be forced to fight war based upon the decisions of other states (or opposing factions within the state). It would be ideal if all the world's problems and conflicts could be solved through diplomatic negotiations. However, human nature and history demonstrate that fear, honour, and interest continue to motivate people to fight. War is not over, but warfare will continue to evolve, based upon changes to the strategic context.

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