

YORAM DINSTEIN

THIRD EDITION

The Conduct of Hostilities under the Law of International Armed Conflict

Third Edition

Yoram Dinstein



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The Conduct of Hostilities under the Law of International Armed Conflict

Written by the leading commentator on the subject, this is the seminal text-book on the law of international armed conflict. Focusing on recent issues arising in the course of hostilities between States, it explores the dividing line between lawful and unlawful combatants, the meaning of war crimes and command responsibility, the range of prohibited weapons, the distinction between combatants and civilians, the parameters of targeting and proportionality, the loss of protection from attack (including 'direct participation in hostilities'), and special protection (granted, pre-eminently, to the environment and to cultural property). In a completely revised and updated text, the author expertly covers the key principles and examines important new issues, such as the use of autonomous weapons and the complexities of urban warfare. The subtleties and nuances of the international law of armed conflict are made accessible to the student and practitioner alike, whilst retaining the academic rigour of previous editions.

YORAM DINSTEIN is Professor Emeritus at Tel-Aviv University. He is a former President of the University (1991–98), as well as former Rector and former Dean of the Faculty of Law. He served twice as the Charles H. Stockton Professor of International Law at the US Naval War College in Newport, RI. He was also a Humboldt Fellow at the Max Planck Institute of International Law in Heidelberg, a Meltzer Visiting Professor of Law at New York University and a Visiting Professor of Law at the University of Toronto. He is a Member of the Institute of International Law.

Introduction to the Third Edition

This is a completely revised and updated edition of a book originally published in 2004 and revised in 2010. In the interval, the law of international armed conflict has not stood still. State practice has grown, new case law has emerged, and there has been a constant outflow of additional books, essays and notes about the conduct of hostilities. There is growing interest in developing weapon technologies (such as cyber and drones), but perennial issues – like urban warfare – also tend to raise novel complex issues.

The book has greatly benefited from being used as a teaching tool in a number of classrooms, both in law schools and in military colleges, in several countries. This has led to substantial feedback by way of comments and queries pressing for further elucidation of contentious points. It is hoped that the present edition will provide adequate answers and shed further light on the *lex lata*.

By now, the present volume serves as a companion to three other books printed by Cambridge University Press, dealing respectively with the *jus ad bellum*,* the law of belligerent occupation,** and non-international armed conflicts.*** Broadly speaking, between them, the four publications cover the general spectrum of the law of armed conflict in its various aspects. Every effort has been made to minimize repetition, and matters explored in detail in the complementary works are not rehashed here.

To facilitate syntax, generic pronouns relating to individual combatants or civilians are usually drawn in masculine form. This must not be viewed as gender-specific.

^{*} Y. Dinstein, War, Aggression and Self-Defence (5th edn, 2011)

^{**} Y. Dinstein, The International Law of Belligerent Occupation (2009).

^{***} Y. Dinstein, Non-International Armed Conflicts in International Law (2014)

Once it was believed that when the cannons roar, the laws are silent. Today everybody knows better. In fact, the sheer number of international legal norms governing the conduct of hostilities is phenomenal. Legal themes like proportionality, indiscriminate warfare or the prohibition of mass destruction weapons (to cite just a few prime examples) are bruited about – not necessarily in legal terminology – by statesmen, journalists and lay persons around the globe. The public posture seems to be that, if wars are too important to be left entirely to generals and admirals, so are the laws applicable in war.

The growing public interest in the law of international armed conflict – as much as the increasing desire to see those who breach it criminally prosecuted – attests to a radical change in the *Zeitgeist*, compared to yester-year. The reasons for the change are immaterial for the present volume. Perhaps the evolution is simply due to the fact that, in the electronic era, the horrors of war can be literally brought home to television screens thousands of miles away from the battlefield. Be it as it may, everybody feels more than ever affected by any armed conflict raging anywhere. By the same token, almost everybody seems to have ideas and suggestions as to how to augment the humanitarian component in the law of international armed conflict. This is a laudable development. But it is important to keep constantly in mind the sobering thought that wars are fought to be won.

Some people, no doubt animated by the noblest humanitarian impulses, would like to see warfare without bloodshed. However, this is an impossible dream. War is not a game of chess. Almost by definition, it entails human losses, suffering and pain, as well as destruction and devastation. As long as war is waged, humanitarian considerations cannot be the sole legal arbiters of the conduct of hostilities. The law of international armed conflict does forbid some means and methods of warfare, with a view to minimizing the losses, the suffering, the pain and the destruction. But it can do so only when there are realistic alternatives to achieving the military goal of victory in the war. Should nothing be theoretically permissible to Belligerent Parties, ultimately everything will be permitted in practice – because the rules will be brushed aside.

The present book is devoted to the core of the *jus in bello*, that is, the conduct of hostilities in inter-State armed conflicts — on land, at sea and in the air — analyzed against the background of customary international law and treaties in force. The conduct of hostilities will be examined in this volume in light of contemporary norms. While some past practices and future prospects will be mentioned briefly, it is the present time that we shall concentrate on. In essence, the purpose is to dissect the *jus in bello* neither as it was perceived in the past nor as it may be desired in the future (*lex ferenda*), but as it is legally prescribed and actually complied with at the time of writing (*lex lata*).

The book is designed not only for international lawyers, but also as a tool for the instruction of military officers. There is a manifest need to train officers at all levels of command in the principles and rules of the law of international armed conflict. This must be done in advance, namely, already in peacetime. Battle-grounds are characterized by split-second decisions, which must be predicated on an instinctive response developed in hard training. Just as every military service is seeking to instil into officers and other ranks a remarkable acumen as regards eventualities likely to be encountered during combat operations, it has to impress upon soldiers, sailors and aviators the constraints on their freedom of action imposed by law.

It goes without saying that laymen cannot be expected to be familiar with every intricacy of a system of law. Yet, all those going through military training must become acquainted with the salient rules of the law of international armed conflict, understanding the legal implications of commands issued and obeyed in combat conditions. That is the only way to guarantee that no serious breaches of the law will be perpetrated, and that no charges of war crimes will be instigated. It is also the only way to ensure that no gap will develop between legal norms and reality: the 'ought' and the 'is'.

Table of cases

(References are to page numbers)

A and B v. State of Israel (Israel), 46

Al-Bashir, Prosecutor v. (ICC), 331

Al Nawar v. Minister of Defence et al. (Israel), 283

Aleskovski, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 314

Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Croatia v. Serbia) (ICJ), 163–4

Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo, Case Concerning (Congo v. Uganda) (ICJ), 32

Arrest Warrant of 11 April 2000, Case Concerning the (Congo v. Belgium) (ICJ), 329–30

Banković et al. v. Belgium et al. (ECHR), 34-5

Blaškić, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 142, 144, 162, 182, 215, 289, 297, 306, 308, 311, 314, 316, 328

Bralo, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 328

Brdjanin et al., Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 199

Corfu Channel Case (Merits) (ICJ), 13

Chusaburo, Trial of Yamamoto (UK), 323

Delalić *et al.*, Prosecutor v. ('Celebici' case) (ICTY), 45, 188, 281, 311, 313, 315, 322, 328–9

Delić, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 309

Eck and Others, In re (The Peleus case) (UK), 318

Einsatzgruppen case (US v Ohlendorf et al.) (Subsequent Proceedings), 319–20

Erdemović, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 320-1, 326, 328

Eritrea-Ethiopia Claims Commission, 84–5, 102–3, 107–10, 113–14, 121, 123, 150, 164–5, 173, 212, 251, 282

Flesche Case (Holland), 278-9

Furundzija, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 33

Galić, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 141, 146, 154, 159

Gotovina et al., Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 163-4

Gross-Brauckmann, In re (France), 133

Hadžihasanović et al., Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 309

Halilović, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 307

Hamdan v. Rumsfeld et al. (US), 66

High Command case (US v. von Leeb *et al.*) (Subsequent Proceedings), 254, 301–2, 307, 310, 313, 324

Hostage case (US v. List *et al.*) (Subsequent Proceedings), 10–11, 288, 296 Jokić, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 213

Jurisdictional Immunities of the State case (Germany v. Italy) (ICJ), 329

Justice case (US v. Altstoetter et al.) (Subsequent Proceedings), 324

Kappler Case (Italy), 302-3

Karadžič and Mladič, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 297

Kassem et al., Military Prosecutor v. (Israel), 54-5

Koi et al., Public Prosecutor v. (UK), 55-6, 59

Kordić et al., Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 145, 215, 306

Kovačević, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 322

Krnojelac, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 307

Krstić, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 307

Kunarac et al., Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 27-8, 32, 188

Kupreškić et al., Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 14-15, 295

Kvočka et al., Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 323

Legal Consequences for States of the Continued Presence of South Africa in Namibia (South West Africa) notwithstanding Security Council Resolution 276 (1970), Advisory Opinion on (ICJ), 7

Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion on (ICJ), 31–2

Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons, Advisory Opinion on (ICJ), 12–15, 24, 31–2, 72, 95–7, 144, 153, 230, 239, 247, 333

Lubanga, Prosecutor v. (ICC), 175, 189

Martić, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 148-9, 296

Milošević, Prosecutor v. Dragomir (ICTY), 178

Mohamed Ali *et al.* v. Public Prosecutor (UK), 51, 59 Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, Case Concerning Certain

Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, Case Concerning Certain Questions of (Djibouti v. France) (ICJ), 329

Nicaragua, Case Concerning Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against (Merits) (ICJ), 36, 47–8, 85

Norman, Prosecutor v. (SCSL), 189

North Sea Continental Shelf Cases (ICJ), 16

Nuremberg Trial (IMT), 22, 71, 78-9, 263, 270, 298-9, 301, 319, 322, 324-8

Obligation to Prosecute or Extradite, Questions Relating to the (Belgium v. Senegal) (ICJ), 33–4

Quirin et al., Ex parte (US), 45-6, 51, 59

Right of Passage over Indian Territory, Case Concerning (Merits) (ICJ), 17

Perišić, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 309

Table of cases xix

Skorzeny et al., Trial of (US), 273
Stanišić et al., Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 306
Strugar, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 211, 308–9
Tadić, Prosecutor v. (ICTY), 1, 36, 55
Targeted Killings case (Public Committee against Torture in Israel et al. v.
The Government of Israel et al.) (Israel), 176, 178
Taylor, Prosecutor v. (SCSL), 327
Tokyo Trial (IMTFE), 22, 301–2, 310, 329–30
Toyoda, Trial of Admiral (US), 310
Yamashita, In re (US), 301, 310

Table of treaties

(References are to page numbers)

1856	Paris Declaration Respecting Maritime Law, 21, 43
1864	Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the
	Wounded in Armies in the Field, 22–3
1868	St. Petersburg Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Time of War, of
	Explosive Projectiles under 400 Grammes Weight, 9-10, 21,
	73, 77, 79
1899	Hague Convention (II) with Respect to the Laws and Customs of
	War on Land, and Annexed Regulations, 4, 10, 13, 19, 21, 23,
	39, 73-4, 203-4
1899	Hague Convention (III) for the Adaptation to Maritime Warfare of
	the Principles of the Geneva Convention of 22 August 1864, 23
1899	Hague Declaration (IV, 2) Concerning Asphyxiating Gases, 91
1899	Hague Declaration (IV, 3) Concerning Expanding Bullets, 79
1906	Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the
	Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field, 22-3, 333
1907	Hague Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War
	on Land, and Annexed Regulations, 13, 21-3, 298-9
	Art. 1, 39
	Art. 2, 18–19
	Art. 3, 289
	Reg. 1, 48, 51
	Reg. 2, 48, 57
	Reg. 3, 48–9
	Regs. 4–20, 23
	Reg. 13, 49, 58
	Reg. 23, 10, 12, 73, 78, 100, 193–4, 246, 264–7, 269–74,
	287–8
	Reg. 24, 274, 276
	Reg. 25, 125, 132, 135
	Reg. 26, 172
	Reg. 27, 203–4, 213, 215
	Reg. 28, 281
	Reg. 29, 276–7

Table of treaties xxi

	Reg. 30, 278–9
	Reg. 31, 279–80
	Reg. 32, 195, 270
	Reg. 54, 12
	Reg. 56, 204
1907	Hague Convention (VII) Relating to the Conversion of Merchant
1007	Ships into Warships, 70
1907	Hague Convention (VIII) Relative to the Laying of Automatic Submarine Contact Mines, 85–6
1907	Hague Convention (IX) Concerning Bombardment by Naval Forces in Time of War, 132, 172, 204–5, 281
1007	
1907	Hague Convention (X) for the Adaptation to Maritime Warfare of the Principles of the Geneva Convention, 23
1907	Hague Convention (XI) Relative to Certain Restrictions with Regard
1701	to the Exercise of the Right of Capture in Naval War, 205
1907	Hague Convention (XII) Relative to the Creation of an International
1701	Prize Court, 284
1909	London Declaration Concerning the Laws of Naval Warfare, 286
1919	Neuilly Treaty of Peace with Bulgaria, 88, 91
1919	St. Germain Treaty of Peace with Austria, 88, 91
1919	Versailles Treaty of Peace with Germany, 88, 91
1920	Sèvres Treaty of Peace with Turkey, 88, 91
1920	Trianon Treaty of Peace with Hungary, 88, 91
1922	Washington Treaty Relating to the Use of Submarines and Noxious
	Gases in Warfare, 91
1925	Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of
	Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of
	Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, 23, 91–3, 95, 294
1929	Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the
	Wounded and Sick in Armies in the Field, 22–3, 298, 333
1929	Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 22–3, 333
1935	Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and
	Historic Monuments (Roerich Pact), 206–7
1936	Procès-Verbal Relating to the Rules of Submarine Warfare Set
	Forth in Part IV of the Treaty of London of 22 April 1930, 132
1945	Charter of the International Military Tribunal, Annexed to the
	London Agreement for the Prosecution and Punishment of the
	Major War Criminals of the European Axis, 298, 300–1,
	324–7
1945	Charter of the United Nations, 4-5, 18, 38, 96, 249, 257, 330-1

xxii	Table of treaties
1945	Statute of the International Court of Justice, Annexed to Charter of the United Nations, 16
1948	Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 300
1949	Geneva Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field, 7, 22–4, 28, 39, 189, 333 Art. 1, 5, 8
	Art. 2, 1, 19
	Art. 3, 47–8
	Art. 7, 28
	Art. 12, 33, 190–1
	Art. 13, 50, 62
	Art. 15, 282
	Art. 16, 28
	Art. 19, 103, 218–19
	Art. 20, 220-1
	Art. 21, 224
	Art. 22, 202
	Art. 24, 196–7
	Art. 25, 196
	Art. 26, 196
	Art. 33, 12, 283
	Art. 34, 12
	Art. 35, 219–20, 283
	Art. 36, 222
	Art. 38, 219
	Art. 40, 197
	Art. 41, 197
	Art. 45, 39
	Art. 46, 292
	Art. 47, 38
	Art. 49, 300, 304
1040	Art. 50, 299, 301
1949	Geneva Convention (II) for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea, 7, 22–4, 28, 39, 333
	Art. 1, 5, 8
	Art. 2, 1, 19
	Art. 3, 47–8
	Art. 7, 28
	Art. 12, 33, 191–2

Table of treaties xxiii

Art. 13, 50, 62

Art. 18, 191, 282

Art. 19, 28

Art. 22, 221

Art. 23, 219

Art. 24, 221

Art. 25, 221

Art. 26, 221

Art. 27, 221

Art. 28, 221

Art. 31, 221

Art. 34, 225

Art. 35, 225

Art. 37, 196-7

Art. 38, 221

Art. 39, 222

Art. 46, 39

Art. 47, 292

Art. 48, 38

Art. 50, 300, 304

Art. 51, 299

Art. 58, 23

1949 Geneva Convention (III) Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 7, 22–4, 28, 39, 43, 45, 333

Art. 1, 5, 8

Art. 2, 1, 19

Art. 3, 47-8

Art. 4, 49-51, 54, 57-8, 62, 65, 139-40, 199

Art. 5, 56, 60

Art. 7, 28

Art. 13, 11, 34, 293-4

Art. 14, 188

Art. 17, 33

Art. 18, 283

Art. 23, 143

Art. 33, 50, 197-8

Art. 85, 302-3

Art. 87, 56

Art. 100, 56

Art. 119, 303

Art. 127, 38

Art. 129, 300, 304

```
xxiv Table of treaties
```

Art. 130, 299

Art. 134, 23

Art. 135, 23

1949 Geneva Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 7, 22–4, 28, 39, 45, 175–6, 187, 333

Art. 1, 5, 8

Art. 2, 1, 19

Art. 3, 47-8

Art. 5, 29, 44, 47, 176

Art. 8, 28

Art. 15, 127-8

Art. 16, 191, 282

Art. 17, 191, 254

Art. 18, 103, 191, 219

Art. 20, 196-7

Art. 21, 220-1

Art. 22, 222

Art. 23, 260-1

Art. 27, 187

Art. 28, 181 Art. 32, 33-4

Art. 33, 29, 47, 282, 293

Art. 34, 296

Art. 53, 246

Art. 59, 259

Art. 144, 38

Art. 146, 300, 304 Art. 147, 246, 288–9, 296, 299

1950 [European] Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 30–1

1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 23, 206, 211

Preamble, 208

Art. 1, 207-8

Art. 4, 208, 211, 282, 293

Art. 6, 207

Art. 8, 103, 123-4, 209

Art. 11, 12

Art. 14, 283

Art. 16, 207

Art. 25, 38

Art. 36, 206

Table of treaties xxv

1966	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 30-1, 34
1968	Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity, 303
1968	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 101
1969	
	American Convention on Human Rights, 30 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 7, 17–18, 40
1969 1970	Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons
1970	and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Sea-Bed and
	the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof, 97
1971	Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and
17/1	Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons
	and on Their Destruction, 93–5, 101
1974	European Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory
	Limitation to Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes, 303
1976	Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use
	of Environmental Modification Techniques (ENMOD
	Convention), 231-5, 242-5, 247-50
1977	Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949,
	and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International
	Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 14, 24–5, 333
	Preamble, 6
	Art. 1, 13, 37, 243
	Art. 8, 141–2, 196, 201, 220, 222
	Art. 10, 191–2
	Art. 11, 34
	Art. 12, 220, 224
	Art. 13, 202–3, 224–5
	Art. 15, 196–7 Art. 17, 301
	Art. 18, 197–8, 223
	Art. 20, 293
	Art. 21, 220
	Art. 22, 221–2
	Art. 23, 222
	Art. 24, 222
	Art. 25, 222–3
	Art. 26, 223
	Art. 27, 223
	Art. 28, 226
	Art. 35, 4, 74, 100, 235–41, 243–5, 247, 250
	Art. 36, 99–101
	Art. 37, 62, 265–6, 269–72, 274–5, 279

Art. 38, 270-2

Art. 39, 272-3, 279

Art. 40, 194

Art. 41, 11, 190-1, 201

Art. 42, 194, 201

Art. 43, 61-2, 118, 134, 197-8

Art. 44, 61-4, 269

Art. 45, 47, 60

Art. 46, 61, 280

Art. 47, 61, 67-9

Art. 48, 102, 105, 139

Art. 49, 3, 238

Art. 50, 139, 142, 181

Art. 51, 137, 140, 143-6, 152-7, 159-60, 173-4, 176, 181, 185,

224, 292-3, 295

Art. 52, 8, 103–6, 109–10, 112–13, 115, 136, 142, 144, 160, 203,

213, 215–16, 293, 295

Art. 53, 210-12, 293, 295

Art. 54, 29, 251–3, 255–6, 259, 293, 295

Art. 55, 235-40, 243-5, 247, 250, 293, 295

Art. 56, 117, 226-9, 293

Art. 57, 103, 152, 160, 164-6, 172

Art. 58, 173

Art. 59, 125-7, 132

Art. 61, 198

Art. 62, 198

Art. 65, 198, 201-3

Art. 67, 198, 203

Art. 69, 259

Art. 70, 260-2

Art. 71, 198, 201

Art. 75, 33, 175-6

Art. 76, 187-8

Art. 77, 189

Art. 79, 200-1

Art. 80, 39-40

Art. 82, 39

Art. 83, 38

Art. 85, 145, 299

Art. 86, 309-11

Art. 87, 307-8

Art. 91, 289

Annexes, 197-8, 200, 223