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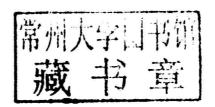
Manual on International Law Applicable to Air and Missile Warfare

by The Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University

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MANUAL ON INTERNATIONAL LAW APPLICABLE TO AIR AND MISSILE WARFARE

Produced By
The Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict
Research at Harvard University





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FOREWORD

It is my pleasure and honor to present the HPCR Manual on International Law Applicable to Air and Missile Warfare and its Commentary. The HPCR Manual provides the most up-to-date restatement of existing international law applicable to air and missile warfare, as elaborated by an international Group of Experts. As an authoritative restatement, the HPCR Manual contributes to the practical understanding of this important international legal framework.

The HPCR Manual and its Commentary are the results of a six-yearlong endeavor led by the Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University (HPCR), during which it convened an international Group of Experts to reflect on the existing rules of international law applicable to air and missile warfare. This Group of Experts, under the guidance of HPCR Senior Academic Advisor, Professor Dr. Yoram Dinstein, has conducted, since 2004, a methodical and comprehensive reflection on international legal rules applicable to air and missile warfare, drawing from various sources of international law. The Black-Letter Rules of the HPCR Manual were adopted by consensus by the Group of Experts in Bern, Switzerland, on 15 May 2009. The Commentary on the Black-Letter Rules was drafted by selected experts from the original group, under the supervision of Professor Dinstein and HPCR Project Coordinator, Bruno Demeyere. While the HPCR Manual restates current applicable law, the Commentary clarifies the prominent legal interpretations and indicates differing perspectives.

We would like, first and foremost, to acknowledge the remarkable role of Professor Yoram Dinstein throughout this process. His internationally recognized expertise and analytical engagement have been instrumental in maintaining the momentum and authority of this initiative over the years. Members of the Group of Experts (please see Appendix I for the full list) have individually made important contributions to each step of the process by studying a particular area of the law of air operations and by providing comments on the overall exercise. We would like to

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recognize, particularly, the members of the Drafting Committee (please see Appendix IV), who have invested countless hours in summarizing the various interpretations of the Black-Letter Rules discussed among the experts. HPCR Project Coordinator Bruno Demeyere managed this process in an adept and diligent manner that was much appreciated by his colleagues.

As ever, this project would not have been possible without the substantial financial support and generosity of its donors, primarily the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. In addition, several governments supported the convening of the Group of Experts in their various meetings, as well as regional consultations, namely Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway. The International Society for Military Law and the Law of War also facilitated consultations with military experts at regular intervals during the project. Words of gratitude are also in order for the Fritz Thyssen Foundation and the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law for their support in hosting of the Group of Experts meetings. Finally, a word of special thanks goes to Barbara Fontana, from the Political Division IV of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, who kept a watchful and constructive eye on this process since its inception.

Through the publication of the *HPCR Manual* and its *Commentary*, HPCR hopes that legal advisors and military officers will benefit from an in-depth presentation – and interpretation – of international law applicable to air and missile warfare. As a result, it is expected that a greater clarity of the law will enhance the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Claude Bruderlein Director, Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research

INTRODUCTION

A. The Background of the Project

Following a series of informal consultations with scholars and governmental experts, the Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research at Harvard University (HPCR) launched in 2004 a multi-annual project, with a view to restating the existing law of air and missile warfare. This initiative, based on the work of renowned international legal experts, culminated in the formulation of the present HPCR Manual on International Law Applicable to Air and Missile Warfare (hereinafter: the HPCR Manual).

Some 80 years earlier, in 1923, the famous Rules of Air Warfare were informally drafted at The Hague by a Commission of Jurists (established in 1922 by the Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armament). The Hague Rules, albeit not binding, have had considerable impact on the development of the customary law of armed conflict. Still, much has happened in the intervening 80 years in air warfare, which was in its infancy when the Hague Rules were drawn up. Air power has become a central component of the military arsenal of States and plays a critical role in modern warfare. As for missiles, they were not even conceived in 1923. The exponential changes brought about in air and missile technology in the last few decades have transformed the face of the modern battlefield, revolutionized military strategy, and created a series of distinct challenges to the protection of civilians in time of armed conflict.

Over the course of the recent decades, the challenge of applying existing law to the use of aircraft and missiles in time of hostilities has amply demonstrated that there are bones of contention regarding the scope and content of the international legal rules pertaining to air and missile warfare. More recently, the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles – frequently referred to as "drones" – has brought even greater attention to the need for a clear understanding of the applicable legal framework.

Although, since the drafting of the 1923 Rules of Air Warfare, a number of international treaties have been adopted in response to developments in modern warfare (in particular, the four 1949 Geneva Conventions for the Protection of War Victims and the two Additional Protocols of 1977, as well as diverse conventions regarding cultural property, biological weapons, chemical weapons, etc.), it must be taken into account that (i) these instruments, although containing rules relevant to air and missile warfare, do not address a number of important aspects of air and missile operations; and (ii) while the Geneva Conventions are universal in their scope of application, other instruments (especially AP/I) are not binding on all States: non-Contracting States (primarily the United States) explicitly contest some of their rules. It is for that reason that the Commentary on the HPCR Manual has endeavored to identify US practices and positions which are consistent with the rules of AP/I.

It is important to bear in mind that the current daunting challenges to the law of air and missile warfare are not derived merely from the rapid pace of development of new technologies. There is also an urgent need to confront new methods of warfare (however gruesome), introduced by international terrorism. At least since 11 September 2001, the law of armed conflict has been forced to consider, e.g., the use of a hijacked civilian airliner as a weapon (*cf.* Rule 63 (b) of this Manual).

The lack of a contemporary methodical restatement of the law regulating air and missile warfare has become particularly glaring in light of the successful effort to restate the law applicable to sea warfare, culminating in the San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea (published by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in 1995). Most of the rules of the San Remo Manual, while non-binding, have gained over time extended support from leading maritime powers. The San Remo Manual covers – to some extent – aerial elements of naval warfare, which are mentioned in the Commentary on the HPCR Manual. But, naturally, this was not the main thrust of the San Remo text.

The present project uses the San Remo Manual as a model. Like the San Remo Manual, the HPCR Manual must not be confused with a draft treaty, prepared as the groundwork for a future diplomatic conference. The goal is rather to present a methodical restatement of existing international law on air and missile warfare, based on the general practice of States accepted as law (opinio juris) and treaties in force. No attempt has been made to be innovative or to propose new norms (lex ferenda), however desirable this may appear to be: the sole aim of this project has been to systematically capture in the text existing rules of international law

(lex lata). Since the authors of the HPCR Manual have no power to legislate, it is freely acknowledged that the emerging restatement must be evaluated not on the basis of logic, expediency, or policy considerations. The only test is whether the text of the HPCR Manual is an accurate mirror-image of existing international law. For its part, existing international law is presented with no attempt to conceal any blemishes or inadequacies.

All too frequently, due to the immense proliferation of international law – and the inability of any single expert to be familiar in detail with all its divergent branches – there is a growing tendency of overspecialization in the field. In the preparation of the *HPCR Manual*, it was deemed indispensable to tie together separate strands of the law, going beyond the strict law of armed conflict to incorporate norms of air law (the Chicago Convention of 1944 and its subsequent annexes), maritime law (the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea), etc., insofar as they are relevant to air and missile operations.

B. The Process

The genesis of the present project was in the first Informal High-Level Expert Meeting on Current Challenges to International Humanitarian Law (so-called Alabama 1 meeting), co-organized by HPCR and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in January 2003. A key recommendation of government representatives at the meeting focused on the importance of addressing potential gaps in the present law of armed conflict applicable to high-tech warfare. The theme of air and missile warfare was identified as a high-priority area for the restatement of existing international law. HPCR emerged as the facilitator of this new project (directed by Professor Yoram Dinstein as Program Advisor).

Following consultations with key governments and representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), HPCR convened a Group of Experts, which ultimately grew to approximately 30 qualified international scholars and practitioners, including selected experts from government circles (military and civilian) and from the ICRC, all of them participating in the project in their purely personal capacity (the names of all the experts appear in Appendix I, A). Government representatives of donor countries (a roster that grew over the years to include Switzerland, Germany, Norway, Belgium, Sweden, Australia, and Canada) were also invited in their official capacity to observe the deliberations of the Group of Experts (see Appendix I, B). It ought to be made clear that the views

expressed in the *HPCR Manual* do not necessarily reflect those of the governments or institutions for which some of the experts participating in the project are working.

The first meeting of the Group of Experts took place at Harvard University in January 2004, and it came up with a Plan of Action: more than 20 topics were selected and assigned to individual experts, with a view to the preparation of research papers (roughly matching the various Sections of the emerging HPCR Manual). It is hoped that the principal research papers will ultimately be published in a revised form: they lie at the root of the HPCR Manual and explain many of the decisions taken by the Group of Experts.

The Group of Experts met several times, in order to examine the research papers and debate legal issues. After thorough examination of the papers, the Group of Experts drew up a first version of the *HPCR Manual* (consisting of Black-letter Rules) in Brussels in March 2006. A final text of the Black-letter Rules of the *HPCR Manual* was adopted by the Group of Experts in Bern on 15 May 2009. A list of all sessions of the Group of Experts is produced in Appendix II.

From the onset of the project, it was perceived that – if the *HPCR Manual* is to have any impact in the world of reality – it cannot be finalized without prior consultations with governments. While HPCR did not seek the endorsement of governments for the Manual, it believes that their views as to the applicable law are indispensable to the elaboration of both the Black-Letter Rules and the Commentary. The first consultation took place when the Brussels draft Manual was presented to representatives from approximately 25 States at the Third Informal High-Level Expert Meeting on Current Challenges to International Humanitarian Law (so-called Alabama 3 meeting), held in Montreux, Switzerland, in May 2006. Participating government representatives provided many critical comments and observations. These were subsequently reviewed by the Group of Experts, leading to a considerable revision of the *HPCR Manual*.

The HPCR Manual (in a number of updated versions) was also submitted to a series of regional and bilateral informal meetings with State representatives (for a complete list of meetings, and States taking part in these consultations, see Appendix III). In all, most of the leading States in the sphere of air and missile warfare have been consulted. Although participation of States in any of the consultation meetings does not imply official endorsement of the specific formulation of any given Black-letter Rule of the HPCR Manual, it is hoped that the final text of the HPCR Manual will be put to actual use by their respective armed forces.

C. The Purpose of the HPCR Manual and Its Commentary

The HPCR Manual does not have a binding force, but hopefully it will serve as a valuable resource for armed forces in the development of rules of engagement, the writing of domestic military manuals, the preparation of training courses, and - above all - the actual conduct of armed forces in combat operations. In the first place, the goal is to provide armed services' lawyers - who advise military commanders, draft legal texts, and plan legal modules of military training - with a pragmatic and cogent text, assisting them in carrying out their crucial tasks. But, moreover, it is hoped that military commanders in the field will find in the HPCR Manual a practical tool that will make decision making easier in a realtime operational environment and that they will consult it when the need arises. In the final analysis, the possibility to consult the HPCR Manual ought to make the officers concerned (including, but not exclusively, individual members of aircrews) more confident of themselves at a time when decisions have to be made rapidly. If something goes wrong in a military operation, there is a regrettable tendency to appraise what happened on the basis of hindsight criteria. The objective of the HPCR Manual is to be of help to those who plan, approve, or execute air or missile operations before rather than after the event.

Surely, the HPCR Manual is designed for operational use not only by air forces but also by other segments of the armed forces in time of armed conflict, as well as by those organizations and entities mandated to monitor and report on the implementation of international law by the parties to armed conflicts. In particular, when it comes to targeting and precautions, knowledge and understanding of the law of air and missile warfare is of crucial importance not only to the commanders, air staffs, and aircrews of the attacking air powers but also to all those engaged in the protection of populations. Needless to say, it is hoped that the HPCR Manual will be used extensively in training and instruction courses (not only in wartime but also in peacetime), so as to familiarize prospective users with the patterns of behavior expected of them.

(i) The Black-Letter Rules of the HPCR Manual

The Black-letter Rules of the *HPCR Manual* are the product of the collaborative effort of the Group of Experts as a whole. In large parts, the Black-letter Rules reflect the overall consensus of the Group of Experts as to the state of the most salient elements of the existing law of international

armed conflict (also known as International Humanitarian Law) bearing on air and missile warfare in 2009. Obviously, international law is not static. In time, the *HPCR Manual* may have to be revised to reflect future changes in the law.

Consensus for the purposes of the drafting of the Black-letter Rules of the *HPCR Manual* was understood to mean that no more than two participants in the Group of Experts had reservations about the language in which the Black-letter Rules are couched (caveats were then inserted in the Commentary). Whenever three or more participants in the Group of Experts objected to a given text, it was changed to meet such objections or bridge over conflicting views. In the rare instances in which compromise formulas proved beyond the reach of the Group of Experts, it was agreed to follow in the text the majority view but to give in the Commentary full exposure to the dissenting opinions.

The HPCR Manual is divided into 24 Sections of varying lengths, depending on the "density" of State practice and the consequent number of norms that have been consolidated in each sphere. Many Sections are divided into sub-sections of General Rules (applicable in armed conflicts across the board, including air or missile warfare) and specific Rules that are geared to air or missile operations.

It was debated in the Group of Experts whether or not to open the HPCR Manual with a Section enumerating the basic principles underlying the law of armed conflict. As a minimum, there are three such cardinal principles (listed by the International Court of Justice in its 1996 Advisory Opinion on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons, paras. 78 and 88), namely, (i) distinction (between combatants and non-combatants and between military objectives and civilian objects); (ii) the prohibition to cause unnecessary suffering to combatants; and (iii) neutrality (the prohibition of incursion by belligerent forces into neutral territory). There are other principles which may be deemed "basic," such as the Martens Clause and the limitation on the right of Belligerent Parties to choose methods or means of warfare. Ultimately, the Group of Experts decided not to include such a general Section in the HPCR Manual. However, most of the basic principles are, of course, incorporated in the relevant text (see, especially, Rules 2 (c), 4, and 5).

(ii) The Accompanying Commentary

Each Black-letter Rule of the HPCR Manual is accompanied by a Commentary that is intended to provide user-friendly explanations for both

legal advisers and those who plan, approve, or execute air or missile operations on both sides of the armed conflict. The format of the Commentary is tailor-made to the requirements of the "ops" officer. Legal cites are kept to a minimum and the Commentary itself is often encapsulated in terse "bullet point" style. The rationale is that there is usually no real need to go through a legal disquisition in order to figure out what must or must not be done.

Since the success of the *HPCR Manual* is essentially contingent on its responsiveness to the needs of both legal advisers and "ops" officers in terms of clarity and relevance to realistic scenarios, the Group of Experts expressed preference for an easily accessible and comprehensible Commentary. The Commentary was formulated by a select Drafting Committee (the list of members and meetings of the Drafting Committee appears in Appendix IV). The Group of Experts as a whole frequently determined what the Commentary on specific Black-letter Rules ought to include. All participants also had an opportunity to see an earlier version of the Commentary and to critique it. Still, for obvious practical purposes, it was impossible to seek a line-by-line approval of a rather lengthy text by the entire Group of Experts. Hence, whereas the Black-letter Rules of the *HPCR Manual* reflect the views of the members of the Group of Experts, the Commentary must be seen as the sole responsibility of HPCR.

The specific goals of the Commentary are as follows:

- a) Expound underlying premises in the Black-letter Rules and shed light on points that may require greater clarity.
- b) Elaborate ideas mentioned *en passant* in the text, and explain decisions taken by the Group of Experts.
- c) Cite treaties (a Table of Treaties cited in the Commentary appears in Appendix V) and other official instruments (such as recent military manuals), as well as relevant case law, in support of the text. There are no references to academic writings in the Commentary, it being understood that the views of scholars will be presented in full in the published research papers underpinning the *HPCR Manual*.
- d) Address controversial issues not covered by the Black-letter Rules themselves.
- e) Give full expression to differing positions that emerged in the deliberations of the Group of Experts about the substance of the law. The Commentary points out where compromise solutions have been worked out in order to reconcile divergent approaches.

- f) Add to some Black-letter Rules an extrapolation that had originally been included in the black-letter language but was later relegated by the Group of Experts to the Commentary, as a mode of building a consensus for the black-letter phraseology (objections to the wording were often withdrawn on the understanding that a sentence or paragraph the text of which was agreed upon will appear in the Commentary rather than in the Black-letter Rule).
- g) Indicate whether the Black-letter Rule is also applicable in non-international armed conflicts (see *infra* E of this Introduction).

D. Themes Excluded from the Manual

From the very inception of the project, it was understood that the *HPCR Manual* is designed for operational use in the conduct of hostilities (*jus in bello*). Hence, it does not cover issues of:

- a) Jus ad bellum, especially questions of aggression, armed attack, and self-defense. A basic principle of the jus in bello is that it applies equally to all Belligerent Parties, irrespective of their respective standing pursuant to the jus ad bellum. In this context, it ought to be stressed that the HPCR Manual has been written without prejudice to binding decisions, adopted by the UN Security Council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
- b) Individual penal accountability under international criminal law. In other words, the HPCR Manual deals with the substance of the law of armed conflict and not with its penal repercussions in terms of prosecution for war crimes (or any other crimes).
- c) Implementation and enforcement of the law in the relations between States. Thus, in particular, belligerent reprisals are not dealt with.
- d) There was discussion of human rights law without agreement. Most members of the Group of Experts believe that it has only minimal bearing on air and missile warfare in international armed conflicts because the law of armed conflict is *lex specialis*.

Moreover, although the original (2006) draft *HPCR Manual* dealt with issues of military operations in outer space, it was agreed to delete these Black-letter Rules from the text, in response to the vigorous recommendation of most government representatives in the Montreux meeting ("Alabama 3"). While the Group of Experts recognized the growing importance of outer space as far as reconnaissance or missile operations

are concerned, it decided to abide by the view prevalent in Montreux, leaving the subject for a separate study in the future.

E. Scope of the Manual

In the Plan of Action session, the Group of Experts resolved not to address the subject matter of non-international armed conflicts. The decision met with harsh criticism in Montreux and the Group of Experts gave the matter further reflection. While accepting the Montreux desire to bring noninternational armed conflicts within the framework of the HPCR Manual, it was impossible to ignore serious terminological difficulties implicit in the disparity between the Parties to the conflict. Terms such as "Belligerent Parties," "enemy," "Neutral," and even "combatants" are overtly inappropriate for usage in non-international armed conflicts. Instead of employing imprecise generic terms for both types of armed conflict, the Group of Experts arrived at the conclusion that it would be better to confine the Black-letter Rules to international armed conflicts, yet in the Commentary on every Black-letter Rule to indicate clearly whether it is specifically applicable also to non-international armed conflicts. Where this is not the case, the Commentary explains whether the Black-letter Rule is totally irrelevant to non-international armed conflicts or is applicable to them in a different fashion.

F. Terminology

As far as possible, the *HPCR Manual* uses consistent terminology throughout the Black-letter Rules. Where necessary, it is advisable to consult Rule 1 (Definitions) as a guide for the meaning of expressions employed elsewhere in the text. Definitions apart, certain linguistic usages may require an explanation:

- a) The Group of Experts decided to avoid in the Black-letter Rules some popular terms that are apt to cause confusion (e.g., "dual-use facilities" and "information warfare").
- b) Whenever the word "presumption" appears in the text, it is understood that the presumption is rebuttable.
- c) The HPCR Manual generally avoids use of the term "shall," inasmuch as the Group of Experts wished to emphasize that the present Manual is a restatement of existing law and is not by itself the source of binding legal norms. Hence, when mandatory language (indicating

the existence of an international legal obligation) is called for, the expressions used are either "must" or "have (has) to." When the Group of Experts wanted to denote that a certain conduct is desirable albeit not obligatory, this is connoted by the words "ought to." The phrase "should" has been reserved to convey the message that there was a certain disagreement on the subject within the Group of Experts: some participants thinking that an obligation does exist and others denying it. In the absence of a consensus, it was felt best to signify through the word "should" that the existence of an obligation is cast in doubt.

d) The Commentary uses extensively abbreviations for names of treaties (e.g., GC/I), courts (e.g., ICJ), and common expressions (e.g., POW). A list of all abbreviations is appended herewith (Appendix VI).

BLACK-LETTER RULES OF THE HPCR MANUAL ON INTERNATIONAL LAW APPLICABLE TO AIR AND MISSILE WARFARE

Adopted by the Group of Experts in Bern, Switzerland, on 15 May 2009.

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