

THE LAW OF ARMED CONFLICT

The Law of Armed Conflict: International Humanitarian Law in War introduces law students and undergraduates to the law of war in an age of terrorism. Which law of armed conflict (LOAC) or its civilian counterpart, international humanitarian law (IHL), applies to a particular armed conflict? Does that law apply to terrorists? Can terrorists be obliged by the international community to abide by that law? What is the status of the participants in an armed conflict? What constitutes a war crime? What (or who) is a lawful target and how are targeting decisions made? What are "rules of engagement" and who formulates them? Which weapons are unlawful and what renders them such? What is the status of land mines, cluster munitions, and white phosphorus in LOAC, in international law, and in American law? This book takes the student through these LOAC/IHL questions and more, employing real-world examples, moving from the basics to the finer points of battlefield law. The book is a United States-weighted text that incorporates lessons and legal opinions from jurisdictions worldwide. From Nuremberg to 9/11, from courts-martial to the U.S. Supreme Court, from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, the law of war is explained, interpreted, and applied.

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The Law of Armed Conflict

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW IN WAR

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United States Military Academy





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Contents

able of Cases	page xv
Table of Treaties	xxi
Foreword	XXV
Preface	xxix
Acknowledgments	xxxi
AW OF ARMED CONFLICT: INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW IN WAR	
1. Rules of War, Laws of War	3
1.0. Introduction	3
1.1. The Law of War: A Thumbnail History	3
1.1.1. The First International War Crime Prosecution?	3 6
1.1.2. The Emergence of Battlefield Codes	7
1.2. Why Regulate Battlefield Conduct?	7
1.2.1. Difficult Issues	10
1.3. Sources of the Law of Armed Conflict	11
1.3.1. Custom	12
1.3.2. Treaties	14
1.3.3. Legislation and Domestic Law	15
1.3.4. Judicial Decisions	15
1.3.5. Publicists	17
1.4. The Language of the Law of Armed Conflict	20
1.4.1. "The Law of War" or "The Law of Armed Conflict"?	20
1.4.2. International Humanitarian Law, and Human Rights Law	22
1.5. Summary	26
Cases and Materials	27
Hellenica, Book II, by Xenophon	27
The 1474 Breisach Trial	28
United States v. Plenty Horses	30
In Re Göring and Others	34
Prosecutor v. Kupreškić, et al.	36
2. Codes, Conventions, Declarations, and Regulations	38
2.0. Introduction	38
2.1. A Basic Rule of Warfare	3 8
2.2. Francis Lieber	39



vi		Contents
	2.3. Writing the Lieber Code	39
	2.3.1. The Combatant's Privilege	41
	2.3.2. Parsing the Lieber Code	42
	2.4. Lieber's Legacy	46
	2.5. A First Geneva Convention	46
	2.5.1. A Memory of Solferino and the International Committee of the Red Cross	
	2.5.2. The 1864 Geneva Convention	47 48
	2.6. The 1868 St. Petersburg Declaration	49
	2.7. The 1899 and 1907 Hague Peace Conferences	51
	2.7.1. The First Hague Peace Conference	51
	2.7.2. The Second Hague Peace Conference	53
	2.7.3. Parsing 1907 Hague Regulation IV	54
	2.7.4. Parsing 1899 Hague Declaration 3	55
	2.7.5. The Peace Conferences' Legacy	56
	2.8. Summary	57
	Cases and Materials	58
	The Trial of Captain Henry Wirz	58
	The Court-Martial of General Jacob H. Smith	63
	United States v. Pvt. Michael A. Schwarz	65
	United States v. Major Edwin F. Glenn	67
3.	Two World Wars and Their Law of Armed Conflict Results	73
	3.0. Introduction	73
	3.1. The 1906 Geneva Convention	73
	3.2. World War I (1914–1918)	73
	3.2.1. The Leipzig Trials	75
	3.3. The League of Nations	76
	3.4. The 1928 Kellogg–Briand Pact	77
	3.5. The 1929 Geneva Conventions	78 70
	3.6. The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) 3.7. World War II (1939–1945)	79 80
	3.8. The 1949 Geneva Conventions	81
	3.8.1. A Geneva Conventions Roadmap	83
	3.8.1.1. Common Articles	84
	3.8.2. Enact Domestic Penal Legislation for Grave Breaches	85
	3.8.2.1. Charging One's Own Soldiers: The Uniform Code of	,
	Military Justice	86
	3.8.2.2. Charging Civilians I: The 1996 War Crimes Act	87
	3.8.2.3. Charging Civilians II: The Military Extraterritorial	,
	Jurisdiction Act	89
	3.8.2.4. Charging Civilians III: Another Route	91
	3.8.3. Search Out and Try Grave Breaches: aut dedere aut judicare	91
	3.8.4. "Grave Breaches"	93
	3.8.4.1. Crimes, War Crimes, and Grave Breaches	95
	3.8.5. Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, and Crimes against Peace	
	3.8.6. Common Article 3	96
	3.8.6.1. Does Common Article 3 Apply?	98
	3.8.7. War Crimes in Non-international Armed Conflicts	99



Contents	vii
3.8.8. Deciding When Common Article 3 Applies 3.8.9. Are the Geneva Conventions "Quaint" and "Obsolete,"	102
Requiring Change? 3.9. Summary	104 107
	,
Cases and Materials	. 109
The Trial of Lieutenant-General Karl Stenger and Major Benno Crusius	109
"The High Command Case," <i>United States v. Wilhelm von Leeb, et al.</i> The Trial of Heinz Hagendorf	112 116
4. Protocols and Politics	119
4.o. Introduction	
4.1. Why New Law of Armed Conflict?	119 119
4.2. The 1977 Additional Protocols	120
4.2.1. 1977 Additional Protocol I	121
4.2.1.1. New Grave Breaches in Additional Protocol I	121
4.2.1.2. Advances in Additional Protocol I	122
4.2.1.3. Objections to Additional Protocol I	123
4.2.1.3.1. "CARs"	123
4.2.1.3.2. Modification of POW qualifications	125
4.3. 1977 Additional Protocol II	129
4.3.1. Advances in Additional Protocol II	130
4.3.2. Objections to Additional Protocol II	131
4.4. 1977 Additional Protocols I and II in U.S. Practice 4.5. 2005 Additional Protocol III	132
4.6. Summary	136 137
Cases and Materials	
	. 139
The United Kingdom's Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict	139
Prosecutor v. Tadić Commentary to 1949 Geneva Convention I	142
Letter of Transmittal: 1977 Additional Protocol II	142 143
LAW OF ARMED CONFLICT AND INTERNATIONAL	
HUMANITARIAN LAW: A FRAMEWORK	
5. Conflict Status	149
5.0. Introduction	149
5.1. Determining Conflict Status	149
5.1.1. Common Article 2 International Armed Conflicts	150
5.1.2. Armed Conflicts Short of War	151
5.1.3. Common Article 3 Non-international Armed Conflicts	152
5.1.4. "Transformers": Common Article 3 Conflict, to Common Article 2,	
and Back 5.1.5. Dual Status Armed Conflicts	154
5.1.5. Dual Status Affiled Conflicts 5.2. Nonstate Actors and Armed Opposition Groups Are Bound by LOAC/IHL	156
5.2.1. Cross-border Terrorist Attacks by Nonstate Actors	157 159
5.3. Criminal Justice Model or Military Model?	164
5.4. U.S. Military Practice	167
5.5. Summary	167



/iii		Co	ntents
	Case	es and Materials	170
		Determining Conflict Status: An Exercise	170
		Prosecutor v. Fatmir Limaj	172
		Prosecutor v. Dusko Tadić	174
		Case Concerning Military and Paramilitary Activities in and Against	7 1
		Nicaragua	177
		Hamdan v. Rumsfeld	179
		Osirak: Armed Conflict?	180
		Security Council Consideration of a Complaint by Iraq	183
6.	Indiv	vidual Battlefield Status	. 186
	6.0.	Introduction	186
	6.1.	Individual Status	187
	6.2.	Lawful Combatants/Prisoners of War	187
		6.2.1. Retainees	191
	6.3.	Others Whose Status upon Capture is POW	195
	-	6.3.1. Members of Other Militias and Members of Other Volunteer Corps	195
		6.3.1.1. Additional Conditions for POW Status?	197
		6.3.2. Regular Armed Forces Professing Allegiance to an Unrecognized	
		Authority	198
		6.3.3. Persons Who Accompany the Armed Forces without Being	
		Members Thereof	198
		6.3.4. Merchant Marine and Civilian Aircraft Crews	199
		6.3.5. Levée en Masse	200
		6.3.6. Demobilized Military Personnel and Military Internees in Neutral	
		Countries	202
	6.4.	Direct Participation in Hostilities	202
		6.4.1. Criteria for Direct Participation in Hostilities	203
		6.4.2. Organized Armed Groups	205
	_	6.4.3. Continuous Combat Function	205
	6.5.	Unlawful Combatants/Unprivileged Belligerents	206
		6.5.1. The Status of Taliban Fighters	211
	((6.5.2. The Status of al Qaeda Fighters	216
	6.6.	World War II Allied Resistance Fighters: Historical Aside	
		or Modern Preview?	220
	<i>c</i> _	6.6.1. Out of Uniform, Out of Status?	220
	0.7.	Detainee, Enemy Combatant, and Unlawful Enemy Combatant	224
		6.7.1. Detainee	225
		6.7.2. Enemy Combatant 6.7.3. Unlawful Enemy Combatant	225
	6.8.		227
	0.0.	Article 5 "Competent Tribunals" 6.8.1. U.S. Military Practice	228
	6.0	Civilians	231
		Protected Persons	232
		Minimum <i>jus in bello</i> Protections Due Captured Individuals	² 34
		Summary	237 238
		•	
	Case	es and Materials	239
		In Re Buck and Others	239
		Military Prosecutor v. Omar Mahmud Kassem and Others	240



Contents	ix
"The Ĉelebići Case," <i>Prosecutor v. Delalić, et al.</i> Geneva Convention III, Article 5 Hearing: A Guide	² 44 ² 45
7. Law of Armed Conflict's Four Core Principles	250
7.0. Introduction	250
7.1. Distinction	251
7.1.1. The Al Firdos Bunker	257
7.2. Military Necessity	258
7.2.1. Kriegsraison	265
7.3. Unnecessary Suffering	269
7.4. Proportionality	272
7.4.1. What Proportionality Is <i>Not</i> 7.4.2. Proportionality and Force Protection	280 284
7.5. Summary	285
Cases and Materials	
The United States v. Wilhelm List, et al. Shimoda et al. v. State	286
Kupreškić and Others	290
Prosecutor v. Kunarac, et al.	295 296
Prosecutor v. Galić	298
8. What Is a "War Crime"?	301
8.o. Introduction	301
8.1. Defining War Crimes	301
8.2. War Crimes in Recent History	303
8.3. Grave Breaches and Universal Jurisdiction	305
8.3.1. Prosecuting War Crimes: The Required Nexus	307
8.3.2. Prosecuting War Crimes: Who?	309
8.4. Rape and Other Gender Crimes	310
8.5. War Crimes or Not?	313
8.5.1. Escaping Prisoners of War	314
8.5.2. Firing on Mosques 8.5.3. Hostages	316
8.5.4. Human Shields	317 319
8.5.5. Explosive Vests and Burning Bodies	321
8.5.6. Photos of POWs	323
8.5.7. Burying the Enemy Alive	325
8.5.8. Pillage	326
8.5.9. "Double-tapping"	327
8.6. U.S. Military Policy	330
8.7. Summary	331
Cases and Materials	332
Prosecutor v. Dusko Tadić	332
Prosecutor v. Kunarac, et al.	333
"The Zyklon B Case"	335
Prosecutor v. Furundžija In Re Amberger	336
"Double-tapping"	337 338
Dodoic mppg	55°



Contents

LAW OF ARMED CONFLICT AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW: BATTLEFIELD ISSUES

9.	Obec	lience to Orders, the First Defense	341
	9.0.	Introduction	341
	9.1.	A History of the First Defense	342
		9.1.1. The Twentieth Century's Evolving Standard	345
		9.1.2. Genesis of the Current American Standard	349
		9.1.3. World War II and an Old "New" Standard	351
	9.2.	The Standard Applied: The Nuremberg IMT	354
	,	9.2.1. The Standard Applied: The "Subsequent Proceedings"	356
	9.3.	What Orders Should Not Be Obeyed? Manifestly Illegal Orders	358
	9.4.	Upon Receiving a Manifestly Illegal Order	36c
	9.5.	The First Defense in Foreign and International Forums	362
	9.6.	Summary	363
	Case	s and Materials	364
		Attorney-General of the Government of Israel v. Adolf Eichmann	364
		"The Einsatzgruppen Case," The United States v. Ohlendorf, et al.	366
		United States v. Private Michael A. Schwarz	369
		Regina v. Finta	372
		Prosecutor v. Erdemović	373
		United States v. Staff Sergeant Raymond L. Girouard	378
10.	Com	mand Responsibility and Respondeat Superior	381
		Introduction	381
		Command Responsibility and Respondeat Superior: A Brief History	382
	10.1.	10.1.1. My Lai and Respondeat Superior	388
	10.2	Recent Command Responsibility and Respondeat Superior Cases	390
		A Commander's Seven Routes to Trial	391
			396
		Command Responsibility and Respondeat Superior Today	399
	10.5.	10.5.1. Recent Evolutionary Changes	402
	10.6	· · ·	404
		126 - 11	
	Casc		405
			405
		Theater Judge Advocate's Review: The United States v. General	
			407
		Prosecutor v. Halilović	410
		"The Ĉelebići Case," <i>Prosecutor v. Delalić</i> , et al.	410
		Prosecutor v. Blaškić	413
		Prosecutor v. Hadžihasanović	415
		Prosecutor v. Kristić	417
11.	Ruses	s and Perfidy	420
	11.0.	Introduction	420
	11.1.	Perfidy	420
		11.1.1. The Trial of Captain Jack	425
	11.2.	Ruses	426
	11.3.	Perfidy Problems	429



Coı	ntents		xi
	11.4.	Summary	431
	Case	s and Materials	432
	Ouse	Trial of Otto Skorzeny and Others	
		Medal of Honor Citation: Thomas R. Norris	432
		Wedai of Honor Citation. Homas ix. Points	434
12.		rre	. 436
		Introduction	436
		Torture Background	439
	12.2.	Defining Torture	441
		12.2.1. Defining Torture as a LOAC Violation	446
	12.3.	Why Torture?	448
		12.3.1. Torture Does Not Produce Actionable Intelligence	449
		12.3.2. Intelligence Gained through Torture Is Unreliable 12.3.3. Torture Can Accompany and Promote Other Battlefield	452
		Misconduct	454
		12.3.4. Torture Is Counterproductive on an International Level	454 456
		12.3.5. Torture Endangers Warfighters	461
	12.4.	Waterboarding Is Torture	461
		The Ticking Time Bomb	466
		Torture: Never, or Sometimes, Maybe?	468
		U.S. Military Practice	469
		Summary	473
	Case	s and Materials	. 474
		Prosecutor v. Vasiljevic	474
		"The Ĉelebići Case," <i>Prosecutor v. Delalić, et al.</i>	475
		Prosecutor v. Kunarac, et al.	478
		The Lieutenant Colonel and the Mock Execution	483
		From a "Top Secret" CIA Torture Memorandum	485
12.	Rules	s of Engagement	. 490
-).		Introduction	490
		A Brief History of ROE	490 491
	13.11	13.1.1. Standing Rules of Force (SRUF)	494
	13.2.	What Are "Rules of Engagement"?	495
	_	When SROE/ROE Apply	498
		Formulating Mission-Specific ROE	499
		ROE Content	501
		13.5.1 The Right to Self-Defense	502
		13.5.1.1. A Legal Fine Point: Self-Defense in Human Rights Law	
		and in LOAC/IHL	503
		13.5.2. Escalation of Force	504
		13.5.3. Hostile Act	505
		13.5.4. Hostile Intent	506
		13.5.5. Declared Hostile	507
	12.6	13.5.6. Positive Identification ROE Issues	508
		Summary	510
	- /	•	512
	Case	s and Materials	512
		The Death of Mr. Esequiel Hernandez	512



xii		Contents
	ROE Cards MNC-I ROE CARD	515 516
	Desert Storm ROE	517
14.	argeting	519
	4.0. Introduction	519
	4.1 Defining a Lawful Objective	519
	4.2 Interpreting "Military Objective"	520
	4.3. Targets by Virtue of Nature, Location, Purpose, or Use 14.3.1. Military Objectives Are Limited to Objects Which,	by Their
	Nature 14.3.2. Military Objectives Are Limited to Objects Which,	•
	Location 14.3.3. Military Objectives Are Limited to Objects Which,	by Their
	Purpose 14.3.4. Military Objectives are Limited to Objects Which,	525 by Their
	Use	526
	4.4. Dangerous Forces	528
	4.5. Making Targeting Decisions	530
	4.6. Dual-Use Targets	534
	4.7. Indiscriminate Attacks	536
	4.8. Targeted Killing 14.8.1. Characteristics of Targeted Killing	538
	14.8.2. Direct Participation in Hostilities	542 543
	14.8.3. Does Targeted Killing Broaden the Meaning of "D	
	Participation"? 4.9. Summary	544
		547
	Cases and Materials	547
	"The Einsatzgruppen Case," The United States v. Otto Oh ICTY Committee Report on NATO Bombing of the Fede	ral Republic of
	Yugoslavia Prosecutor v. Kordić and Čerkez	549
	Wired for War	55 ²
		554
15.	ttacks on Cultural Property	
	5.0. Introduction	556 Cultural
	5.1. Background: 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Property	557
	5.2. The 1954 Hague Convention for Protection of Cultural Pr	
	15.2.1. First Protocol to the 1954 Cultural Property Conver	
	15.2.2. Second Protocol to the 1954 Cultural Property Con	
	5.3. Protected Cultural Property in the 1977 Additional Protoco 5.4. Summary	ols 565 567
	Cases and Materials	568
	Property versus Combatant Lives	568
	Prosecutor v. Jokić	569
	Prosecutor v. Prlić, et al.	57 ²
	Prosecutor v. Strugar	574



Co	ontents		X11
16.	The 1980 Certain Conventional Weapons Convention	on	577
	16.0. Introduction		
	16.1. The 1980 U.N. Certain Conventional Weapons	Convention	577 57 ⁸
	16.1.1. CCW Protocol I, Concerning Nondetec		580
	16.1.2. CCW Protocol II, Concerning Mines an		58:
	16.1.2.1. CCW Amended Mines Protoco		58:
	16.1.2.2. The 1997 Ottawa Convention		582
	16.1.2.3. U.S. Antipersonnel Landmines	Policy	582
	16.1.3. CCW Protocol III, Concerning Incendia	ary Weapons	585
	16.1.4. CCW Protocol IV, Concerning Blinding	g Laser Weapons	586
	16.1.5. CCW Protocol V, Concerning Explosive	e Remnants of War	588
	16.2. Cluster Munitions		599
	16.2.1. 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions		592
	16.2.2. U.S. Cluster Munitions Policy		593
	16.3. A Legal Review of Weapons		594
	16.4. Summary		595
	Cases and Materials		595
	Prosecutor v. Martić		595
	White Phosphorus Munitions		597
17.	Gas, Biological, and Chemical Weapons Treaties		600
,	17.0. Introduction		600
	17.1. The 1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of	f Poisonous Gases and	
	Bacteriological Methods of Warfare		60:
	17.1.1. Parsing the 1925 Gas Protocol		602
	17.2. The 1971 UN Convention on the Prohibition of	the Development,	
	Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (I		
	Weapons and on Their Destruction	,	60
	17.2.1. Parsing the 1971 BWC		60
	17.2.2. Negotiating the BWC		610
	17.3. The 1993 Convention on the Prohibition of the	Development,	
	Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical V	Veapons	61:
	17.3.1. Parsing the 1993 CWC		61:
	17.4. CS Gas		615
	17.5 Summary		616
	Cases and Materials		. 616
	The United Kingdom's Manual of the Law of A	rmed Conflict	616
	Prosecutor v. Tadić		618
	The Moscow Theater Hostage Crisis and the Cl	hemical Weapons	
	Convention		619
Ref	ferences		623
Ind			6=:



Table of Cases

War Crimes Trials following the First World War

Dover Castle Case (Commander Karl Neumann), Imperial Court of Justice, Leipzig (1922), at 347–8, 359

Llandovery Castle Case, Imperial Court of Justice, Leipzig (1921), at 348

Trial of Lt. Gen. Karl Stenger and Maj. Benno Crusius, Imperial Court of Justice, Leipzig, (1921), at 109–12

War Crimes Trials following the Second World War

In re *Amberger*, British Military Court (1946), at 337

Trial of Christian Baus, French military tribunal (1947), at 304, 307, 308

Trial of Gustav Becker, Wilhelm Weber and 18 Others, French military tribunal (1947), at 304, 307, 308

In re *Buck and Others*, British Military Court (1946), at 239–40

The Dostler Case, L.R.T.W.C., vol. I (1947), at

Trial of Kapitänleutnant Heinz Eck and Four Others ("The Peleus Trial") I TWC, at 268, 357 U.S. v. Farben, VII TWC (1948), at 357 U.S. v. Flick, VI TWC (1947), at 356, 357 Trial of Grumbelt ("The Scuttled U-Boats Case")

Trial of Grumpelt ("The Scuttled U-Boats Case") (1946), L.R.T.W.C., vol. I (1947), at 357 Trial of Heinz Hagendorf, U.S. Military

Government Court (1946), at 116–18, 303 *Trial of Erich Heyer, et al.* ("The Essen Lynching Case") (1945), at 385, 393

In re *Hirota*, 15 Ann. Dig. (1948), at 56 *Trial of Masaharu Homma*, U.S. Military

Commission (1946), at 384

Trial of Kriminalassistent Karl-Hans Hermann Klinge, S. Ct. of Norway (8 Dec. 1945 and 27 Feb. 1946), at 464 *Trial of Kramer, et al.* ("The Belsen Trial") (1945), L.R.T.W.C., vol. II (1947), at 357 *U.S. v. Krupp*, IX TWC (1949), at 268 *U.S. v. Wilhelm von Leeb* ("The High Command Case"), at 78, 112–15, 261, 349, 356–7, 386–9, 395, 400–1, 410

Trial of Karl Lingenfelder, French Permanent Military Tribunal at Metz (11 March 1947), at 558

U.S. v. Wilhelm List, et al. ("The Hostage Case") (1948), XI TWC 1253–54, at 259, 265, 280–1, 286–90, 318, 346, 357–8, 386–9, 394–5, 400–1, 411, 509

Trial of the Major War Criminals (Nuremberg IMT Judgment, 1947), at 34, 56, 220, 315, 352–4

Trial of Masuda, et al. (1945), U.S. Mil. Comm., Marshall Islands, I L.R.T.W.C., I, at 355, 394–5 Trial of Kurt Meyer ("The Abbaye Ardenne

Trial of Kurt Meyer ("The Abbaye Ardenne Case") (1945), at 385

Trial of Mineno (Yokohama, 1946), at 464 Trial of Nakamura, Asano, Hata and Kita (Yokohama, 1947), at 464

U.S. v. Ohlendorf, et al. ("The Einsatzgruppen Case"), IV TWC (1948), at 268, 346, 355–7, 359, 366–8, 373, 377, 547–9

Rex v. Perzenowski, et al., Canada, Supreme Ct. of Alberta (App. Div.) (1946), at 190

Trial of Major Karl Rauer and Six Others, British Military Court, at 316

Trial of Sandrock, et al. ("The Almelo Trial") L.R.T.W.C., vol. I (1947), at 357

Trial of Shigeru Sawada and Three Others (1946), at 385, 394, 464

Trial of Max Schmid, U.S. Military Government Court (1947), at 94, 194

Trial of Otto Skorzeny and Others, Military Government Court (1947), at 222, 423, 432–4 Trial of Kurt Student, British Military Court

(1946), at 319

xvi Table of Cases

Trial of Bruno Tesch and Two Others (The Zyklon B Case) British Military Court (1946), at 310, 335–6

Trial of Albert Wagner, French Military Tribunal (1946), at 57

Trial of Max Wielen, et al. (The Stalag Luft III/ "The Great Escape" Case) (Sept. 1947), at 314 In re Yamashita, 327 U.S. 1, 14 (1946), at 96, 354, 386–8, 392, 405–10

Trial of Chinsaku Yuki (Manila, 1947), at 464

U.S. Domestic Cases Involving LOAC/IHL-Related Charges

U.S. v. Roy M. Belfast (a.k.a. Chuckie Taylor) (S.D. Fla.) (2008), at 440

U.S. v. Bevans, 24 F.Cas. 1138 (C.C.D. Mass. 1816), at 343

U.S. v. Bright, 24 F.Cas. 1232 (C.C.D. Pa., 1809), at 342

Brown v. United States, 12 U.S. (8 Cranch) 110, 122–23 (1814), at 44, 260

Calley v. Callaway, 519 F.2d 184, 191 fn. 6 (1975), at 87

Commonwealth ex rel. Wadsworth v. Shortall, 206 Pa. 165, 55 A. 952 (1903), at 345

Demjanjuk v. Petrovsky, 776 F. 2d 571 (6th Cir. 1985), at 93, 337

Demjanjuk v. Petrovsky, 10 F. 3d 338 (6th Cir. 1993), at 93

United States v. Demjanjuk, 367 F.3d 623 (6th Cir. 2004), at 93

Demjanjuk v. Mulkasey No. 07–3022 (30 Jan. 2007), at 93

Dow v. Johnson, 100 U.S. 158 (1879), at 344 In re *Fair, et al.*, 100 Fed. 149 (D.Neb. 1900), at 345

Feres v. United States, 340 U.S. 135 (1950), at 350 Filártiga v. Pena-Irala, 630 F. 2d 876 (1980), at 479–80

Ford v. Garcia, 289 F. 3d 1283 (11th Cir., 2002), at

Graham v. Connor, 490 U.S. 386 (1989), at 509,

Grisham v. Hagan, 361 U.S. 278 (1960), at 88 Hamdan v. Rumsfeld, 344 F Supp 2d 152 (2004),

Hamdan v. Rumsfeld, 415 F.3d 33 (2005), at 169 Hamdan v. Rumsfeld, 548 U.S. 557 (2006), at 56, 57, 169, 179–80, 215

Hamdi v. Rumsfeld, 124 S. Ct. 2633 (2004), at 226 Hamilton v. McClaughry, 136 F. 445, 450 (C.C.D. Kan. 1900), at 151

Hately v. State, 15 Ga. 346 (1854), at 345 Illinois v. Lafayette, 462 U.S. 640 (1983), at 505 U.S. v. Jones, 26 F. Cas. 653 (C.C.D. Pa., 1813), at 343 Kadic v. Karadzic, 70 F. 3d 232 (2nd Cir., 1995), cert Den., 64 U.S. 3832 (1996), at 402, 480 Kinsella v. U.S. ex rel. Singleton, 361 U.S. 234 (1960), at 88

Korematsu v. U.S., 323 U.S. 214 (1944), at 21, 264 Latney v. Ignatius, 416 F.2d 821 (1969), at 89 U.S. v. Lee, 744 F.2d 1124 (5th Cir. 1984), at 465 Little et al. v. Barreme et al., 6 U.S. (2 Cranch) 170 (1804), at 343–4, 354

In re Estate of Ferdinand E. Marcos, Human Rights Litigation, 910 F. Supp. (1995), at 465 McCall v. McDowell, 15 Fed. Cas. 1235 (C.C.D. Cal. 1867), at 344, 360

McElroy v. Guagliardo, 361 U.S. 281 (1960), at 88 Medellin v. Texas, 128 S.Ct. 1346 (2008), at 16 Mitchell v. Harmony, 54 U.S. (13 How.) 115, 137 (1851), at 344

Neu v. McCarthy, 309 Mass. 17, 33 N.E.2d 570 (1941), at 343, 351

U.S. v. David A. Passaro, case # 5:04-CR-211-1-BO (E.D. N. C.2006), at 91

U.S. v. Plenty Horses, U.S. District Court, Sioux Falls, SD, acquittal (1891), at 30–5

Prize Cases, 67 U.S. 635 (1863), at 18 Shafiq Rasul et al. v. General Richard Meyers,

et al., 512 F3d 644 (C.A.D.C., 2008), at 440 Reid v. Covert, 354 U.S. 1, 35 (1957), at 88, 90

Riggs v. State, 43 Tenn. 85 (1886), at 345 The Schooner Exchange v. McFaddon, 11 U.S. (7 Cranch.) 116 (1812), at 349

Scott v. Henrich, 978 F.2d 481 (9th Cir. 1992), at

State v. Roy, 64 S.E.2d 840 (1951), at 351 Tennessee v. Garner, 471 U.S. 1, 11 (1985), at 514 Thomas v. State, 134 Ala. 126, 33 So. 130 (1902), at 345

Toth v. Quarles, 350 U.S. 11 (1955), at 88 Underhill v. Hernandez, 168 U.S. 250 (1897), at 97 Wilkes v. Dinsman, 48 U.S. (7 How.) 89, 129–30, 131 (1849), at 343

U.S. v. Ramzi Yousef and Others, 327 F. 3rd 56 (2nd Cir., 2003), at 306

U.S. Military Cases Involving LOAC/IHL-Related Charges

Ex Parte Quirin, 317 U.S. 1 (1942), at 226, 408 Unger v. Ziemniak, 27 M.J. 349 (CMA 1989), at 340

U.S. v. Mohammad Ali (Iraq, 2008), at 89 U.S. v. Averette, 19 USCMA 363 (1970), at 89 U.S. v. Bumgarner, 43 CMR 559 (1970), at 308 U.S. v. Calley, 48 CMR 19 (1973), at 87, 236, 388,

U.S. v. Captain Jack, aka Kientpoos, Military Commision, Ft. Klamath, Oregon (1873), at 425–6

Table of Cases xvii

- U.S. v. Cherry, 22 M.J. 284, 286 (CMA 1986), at 360
- U.S. v. Chessani (Camp Pendleton, CA, 2008). Charges dismissed, at 393
- U.S. v. Coffey, Unreported, pet. for rev. den. (2005), at 327
- U.S. v. Compton (North Africa, 1943). Acquitted, at 27–8
- U.S. v. Conde (USMC, SpCM, Mogadishu, 1993), at 490
- U.S. v. Dykes, 6 M.J. 744 (NCMR 1978), at 360
- U.S. v. Finsel, 33 M.J. 739 (ACMR, 1991), at 490
- U.S. v. Gatlin, 216 F.3d 207 (2d Cir. 2000), at 90
- U.S. v. John Getz, Unreported, pet. for rev. den. (2005), at 327
- U.S. v. Girouard (Fort Campbell, KY, 2007). Acquitted, at 378–80
- U.S. v. Glenn, Samar, P.I. (1902), at 463
- U.S. v. Green, 22 M.J. 711 (ACMR 1986), at 360
- U.S. v. Griffen, 39 C.M.R. 586 (ACMR, 1968), at 360
- U.S. v. Huet-Vaughn, 43 M.J. 105, 107 (1995), at 359
- U.S. v. Keenan, 39 C.M.R. 108 (CMA, 1969), at 371
- U.S. v. Kinder, 14 C.M.R. 742, 750 (AFBR, 1954), at 349, 359–60, 392
- U.S. v. Kotouc (1971). Acquitted, at 86
- U.S. v. Latney, Navy Court-Martial #68–1965 (1965), at 89
- U.S. v. Lloyd, (U.S. Army So. European T. F. and 5th Support Cmd, Vicenza, Italy) (1985), at 360
- U.S. v. McMonagle, 34 M.J. 825 (ACMR, 1992), at 490
- U.S. v. Medina, C.M. 427162 (1971). Acquitted, at 288–00
- U.S. v. Milldebrandt, 25 CMR 139 (C.M.A. 1958),
- at 360 U.S. v. Mowris, GCM (Fort Carson, CO, 1993),
- U.S. v. Potter, 39 CMR 791 (NBR, 1968), at 308
- U.S. v. Rockwood, 52 M.J. 98 (CAAF, 1999), at 398
- U.S. v. Ronghi, 60 M.J. 83 (ACMR, 2004), cert. den., 543 U.S. 1013 (2004), at 309
- U.S. v. Saville (Fort Hood, TX, 2005), at 456
- U.S. v. Schreiber, 18 CMR 226 (C.M.A., 1955), at 360, 392
- U.S. v. Schwarz, 45 C.M.R. 852 (NCMR, 1971), at 65–7, 369–73
- U.S. v. BGen. Jacob H. Smith, (Manila, 1902), at 63
- U.S. v. Tiggs, 40 CMR 352 (A.B.R. 1968), at 349
- U.S. v. Waller (Manila, Special Order No. 54, March 1902), unreported, at 345

- U.S. v. Sgt. Ryan G. Weemer (Camp Pendleton, CA, 2009). Acquitted, at 89
- U.S. v. West (North Africa, 1943), at 385
- U.S. v. Wilson, 30 CMR 165 (C.M.A. 1961), at 360
- U.S. v. Wirz, Military Commission (1865), at 58–63
- U.S. v. Wysong, 26 CMR 29 (C.M.A. 1958), at 360

International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia Cases

- Prosecutor v. Aleksovski, IT-95-14/1-A (24 March 2000), at 236, 396, 401, 485
- *Prosecutor v. Blagojević*, IT-02-60-T (17 Jan. 2005), at 101
- Prosecutor v. Blaškić IT-95-14-T (3 March 2000), at 257, 413–15
- Prosecutor v. Blaškić, IT-95-14-A (29 July 2004), at 57, 309, 403
- Prosecutor v. Brdjanin, IT-99-36-A (3 April 2007), at 298
- Prosecutor v. Delalić (aka Mucić/ "Čelebici"), IT-96-21-T (16 Nov. 1998), at 86, 101, 168, 201, 208, 244–5, 311–12, 327, 403–4, 410, 413, 438, 448, 475–8
- Prosecutor v. Delalić (aka Mucić/ "Čelebici"), IT-96-21-A (20 Feb. 2001), at 99–100, 169, 236, 401, 438, 448
- Prosecutor v. Delić, IT-04-85-T (15 Sept. 2008), at 393
- Prosecutor v. Erdemović, IT-96-22 Indictment (1996), at 373
- Prosecutor v. Erdemović, IT-96-22-T (1996), at 373 Prosecutor v. Erdemović, IT-96-22-T bis (1998), at 356, 373
- Prosecutor v. Erdemović, IT-96-22-A (1997), at 341, 363
- *Prosecutor v. Furundžija*, IT-95-17/1-T (10 Dec. 1998), at 101, 311, 363, 447, 480–1
- *Prosecutor v. Galić*, IT-98-29-T (5 Dec. 2003), at 101, 253, 257, 259, 283
- Prosecutor v. Hadžihasanović, IT-01-47-T (15 March 2006), at 101, 415–17
- Prosecutor v. Hadžihasanović, IT-01-47-A (22 April 2008), at 393, 416
- *Prosecutor v. Halilović*, IT-01-48-T (16 October 2005), at 403, 410, 456
- Prosecutor v. Haradinaj, et al., IT-04-84-T (3 April 2008), at 301
- *Prosecutor v. Jelisić*, IT-95-10-T (14 Dec. 1999), at 101, 327, 448
- *Prosecutor v. Jokić*, IT-02-60-T (17 Jan. 2005), at 569–72
- Prosecutor v. Kayishema and Ruzindana, ICTR-95-1-T (21 May 1999), at 396
- Prosecutor v. Kordić and Čerkez, IT-95-14-T, (26 Feb. 2001), at 168, 264, 298, 575

xviii Table of Cases

Prosecutor v. Kristić, IT-98-33-T (2 Aug. 2001), at 101, 363, 417–19

Prosecutor v. Krnojelac, IT-97-25-T (15 March 2002), at 101, 401, 448

Prosecutor v. Krnojelac, IT-97-25-A (17 Sept. 2003), at 101

Prosecutor v. Kunarac, IT-96-23 & IT-96-23/1-A-T (22 Feb. 2001), at 26, 233, 296, 311–13, 442, 447, 478

Prosecutor v. Kunarac, IT-96-23 & IT-96-23/1-A (12 June 2002), at 22, 101, 313, 333

Prosecutor v. Kupreškić et al., IT-95-16-T (14 Jan. 2000), at 16, 36, 101, 115, 166, 232–3, 275, 295, 301–2

Prosecutor v. Kvočka, 98–03/1-A (28 Feb. 2003), at 101, 311–13

Prosecutor v. Limaj, IT-03-66-T (30 Nov. 2005), at 168, 172

Prosecutor v. Mucić, IT-96-1-A bis (8 April 2003), at 363

Prosecutor v. Musema, ICTR-96-13-A (27 Jan. 2000), at 126

Prosecutor v. Martić, IT-95-11-T (12 June 2007), at 95, 595–7

Prosecutor v. Milošević, IT-98-29/1-T (12 Dec. 2007), at 392

Prosecutor v. Milošević, IT-02-54, Charge in 1st Amended Indictment (23 Oct. 2002), at 95

Prosecutor v. Mrkšić, et al., IT-95-13/1-T (27 Sept. 2007), at 168

Prosecutor v. Naletilic and Martinović, IT-98-34-T (31 March 2003), at 233, 575

Prosecutor v. Nikolić, IT-02-60/1-T (2 Dec. 2003), at 431

Prosecutor v. Orić, IT-03-68-T (30 June 2006), at 57, 101, 381

Prosecutor v. Pavel Struger et al., IT-01-42 (22 Nov. 2002), at 101, 394

Prosecutor v. Prlić, et al., IT-04-74-T, Second Amended Indictment (11 June 2008), at 572-4

Prosecutor v. Rajić, IT-95-12-T (8 May 2006), at 265

Prosecutor v. Rajić, IT-95-12, Review of Indictment (13 Sept. 1996), at 154

Prosecutor v. Stakić, IT-97-24-T (31 July 2003), at 101

Prosecutor v. Strugar, IT-01-42-T (31 Jan. 2005), at 101, 574-6

Prosecutor v. Tadić, IT-94-1, Trial Chamber Decision on Defense Motion on Jurisdiction (10 Aug. 1995), at 96

Prosecutor v. Tadić, IT-94-1-A, Defense Motion for Interlocutory Appeal on Jurisdiction (2 Oct. 1995), at 100, 103, 129, 142, 158, 168, 174–7, 217, 301, 618 Prosecutor v. Tadić, IT-94-1-T, Judgment (7 May 1997), at 101, 142, 153, 155, 333, 448

Prosecutor v. Tadić, IT-94-1-A (15 July 1999), at 57, 155, 168, 236

Prosecutor v. Tadić, IT-94-1, Judgment in Sentencing appeals (26 Jan. 2000), at 95

Prosecutor v. Vasiljević, IT-98-32-T (29 Nov. 2002), at 101, 448, 474-5

International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda Cases

Prosecutor v. Akayesu, ICTR-96-4-T (2 Sept. 1998), at 311–13, 381, 478

Prosecutor v. Bagilishema, ICTR-95-1A-A (2002), at 392

Prosecutor v. Gacumbitsi, ICTR-2001-64-T (17 June 2004), at 313

Prosecutor v. Kajelijeli, ICTR-98-44A-T (1 Dec. 2003), at 402

Prosecutor v. Kayishema and Ruzindana, ICTR-95-1-A (2001), at 97

Prosecutor v. Musema, ICTR-95-13-T (27 Jan. 2000), at 196, 310

Prosecutor v. Nahimana, et al., ICTR-99-52-A (28 Nov. 2007), at 400

Prosecutor v. Semanza, ICTR-97-20-T (15 May 2003), at 101

International Court of Justice Cases

Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo, (2005), at 159

Arrest Warrant of 11 April 2000 (Democratic Republic of Congo v. Belgium), (2002), at 305 Asylum Case (1959), at 12

The Corfu Channel Case, Merits, (1949), at 296 Case Concerning Military and Paramilitary Activities in and Against Nicaragua (Merits), (1986), at 82, 99, 103, 155, 159, 161, 177–9, 296

Iran v. U.S. (Oil Platforms Case) (2003), at 281 North Sea Continental Shelf Cases (1969), at 12

The Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons (Nuclear Weapons Advisory Opinion) (1996), at 22, 269, 272, 296, 527

Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestine Territory (The Wall Advisory Opinion) (2004), at 22, 25–6, 162

Israeli Cases

A and B v. State of Israel, Supreme Court of Israel sitting as the Court of Criminal Appeals, No. 6659/06 (11 June 2008), at 208

Attorney-General of the Government of Israel v. Adolf Eichmann (Israel, Dist. Ct. of Jerusalem, 1961), Judgment; 36 ILR 277 (Isr. S. Ct. 1962), at 306, 364



Table of Cases xix

Demjanjuk v. Attorney General of Israel (29 July 1993), at 306

Israel v. The State of Israel ("The Five Techniques case") (HCJ 5111/94), 1999, at 208 Kafr Kassen case App. 279–83 (1958), at 197, 360 Military Prosecutor v. Omar Mahmud Kassem and Others, Israel, Military Court (1969), at

Public Committee Against Torture in Israel v. The State of Israel (1999) H.C. 5100/94, at 439, 457 Public Committee Against Torture in Israel v. Israel (The Targeted Killing Decision) (2006) HCJ 769/02, at 207

United Kingdom Cases Involving LOAC/IHL-Related Charges

A and others v. Secretary of State for the Home Department (the "Northern Ireland Case") [2005] UKHL 71, at 457

Axtell's Case (1661), Kelng 13; 84 E.R. 1060, at 30, 342

Campbell and Cosans v. U.K. (Feb. 1982) 4 EHRR 293, at 446

Chahal v. United Kingdom, App. No. 22414/93, Judgment (1996), at 467

The Dover Castle Case (U.K., 1920), at 347–8, 359 Case of Ireland v. United Kingdom, App. no. 5310/71, Judgment (1978) 2 EHRR 25, ECtHR, at 441, 467

McCann and Others v. the United Kingdom (1995) 18984/91, at 504

Public Prosecutor v. Mohamed Ali et al. (1968), [1969] AC 430, at 223

Public Prosecutor v. Ooi Hee Koi, et al. [1968] A.C. 829, at 197, 223, 229

Regina v. Bartle and the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolitan District and Others, ex Parte Pinochet (House of Lords, Nov. 1998 and March 1999), at 306

Regina v. Smith, 17 Cape Reports 561 (S. Africa 1900), at 345

Other Cases Involving LOAC/IHL–Related Charges

Abella v. Argentina (Tablada), Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Case # 11.137, Report # 55/97 (1997), at 282, 288

Askoy v. Turkey (1996) 23 EHRR 533, at 441 Prosecutor v. Alex Tamba Brima, Special Court for Sierra Leone-04-16-T (20 June 2007), at 313

Border Guards Prosecution Case (1996), 5 StR 370/92 [BGH] [Supreme Court] (FRG) (West Germany), at 341

Regina. v. Finta [1994] (Canada), at 357, 372 Germany v. N, Decision No. 2 WD 12.04., Bundesverwaltungsgericht (German Federal Administrative Court), 21 June 2005, at 359, 397

Gilboa v. Uruguay, Communication No. 147/1983, Rpt of Human Rts. Cmty, UN Doc. A/41/40, pp. 128 ff., at 485

LJN: AU4373, Rechtbank's-Gravenhage, 09/751005–04, and 09/756–05, Hague District Court (Oct. 2005), unreported, at 488

Niyonteze v. Public Prosecutor, Tribunal militaire de cassation (Switzerland), at 92

France v. Papon, unpublished (18 Sept. 1996), Cour d'appel de Bordeaux, Chambre d'accusation Arrêt du, no. 806, at 341

McCann and Others v. United Kingdom, No. 18984/91, 31 ECt HR (1995), at 504

Muteba v. Zaire, Communication No. 124/1982, Rpt. of Human Rts. Cmty, UN Doc. A/39/40, pp. 182 ff.; 79 ILR 253, at 485

Prosecution v. Refik Saric, unpublished (Denmark High Ct., 1994), at 307

Selmouni v. France, ECtHR (28 July 1999), at 447 Ryuichi Shimoda et al. v. State, Tokyo District Court, 1963 (32 ILR 494), at 290–4

Streletz, Kessler and Krenz v. Germany, ECt HR (2001), at 341, 391

Tomasi v. France, Series A, No. 241-A, App. No. 12850/87, 15 EHRR 1 (1992), at 467



Table of Treaties

1279

Statute of Westminster, 6

```
Peace of Westphalia, 7, 30, 96
1648
       Treaty of Amity and Commerce Between His Majesty the King of Prussia, and the United
1785
          States of America, 14
       Jay Treaty (The Treaty of London), 51
1794
1864
       Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded on the Field of
          Battle, 48, 136, 252
1868
       St. Petersburg Declaration Renouncing the Use in War of Certain Explosive Projectiles, 39,
          43, 49-51, 53, 57, 83, 251, 260, 270, 293, 578
       Declaration Renouncing the Use, in Time of War, of Explosive Projectiles under 400
          Grammes Weight, 260
1874
       Brussels Declaration concerning the Laws and Customs of War, 54, 270
1889
       International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 13
       Hague Convention (II) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land Preamble (the
1899
          Martens Clause), 38, 53, 202
       Hague Declaration (IV, 2) Concerning Asphyxiating Gases, 53, 600-2, 611, 617
1899
       Hague Declaration (IV, 3) Concerning Expanding Bullets, 55, 271, 578
1899
1906
       Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded on the Field of
          Battle, 73, 78, 85, 107
       Hague Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, Annexed
1907
          Regulations (also known as "Hague Regulation IV")
       Arts. 1–3, at 78, 125
                                   Art. 23(a), at 293
                                                                       Art. 28, at 327
       Art. 1, at 393, 406
                                   Art. 23(b), at 421-2
                                                                       Art. 29, at 224
       Art. 3, at 54
                                   Art. 23(e), at 271, 293, 617
                                                                       Art. 31, at 430
       Art. 4, at 446
                                   Art. 23(f), at 116, 429–30
                                                                       Arts. 42-56, at 125
       Art. 14, at 73
                                   Art. 23(g), at 44, 258–9,
                                                                       Art. 46, at 478
       Art. 22, at 38, 57, 260,
                                                                       Art. 47, at 327, 572
                                      300
                                   Art. 24, at 426
                                                                       Art. 53, at 309
       Art. 23, at 44, 270, 433,
                                   Art. 25, at 524, 526, 542
                                                                       Art. 56, at 557
                                   Art. 27, at 316, 527, 566
          600, 611
       Versailles Treaty of Peace with Germany, 74-5, 382
1919
       Covenant of the League of Nations, 76-7
1010
       Sévres Treaty of Peace with the Ottoman Empire, 74
1020
       Washington Conference Naval Treaty, 350
1022
       Draft Hague Rules of Aerial Warfare, 15, 209, 291-2, 520-1, 527, 536
1923
       1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or
1925
          Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, 14, 556, 601-6, 608, 616
       General Treaty for the Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy
1928
          (Kellogg–Briand Pact of Paris), 35, 77–8
       Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 78-9, 81-4, 113, 136, 239
       Art. 7, 8, at 117, 193
       Art. 22, at 105
```

xxi



> xxii Table of Treaties Arts. 31-32, at 114 Art. 79, at 84 Art. 81, at 200 Charter of the United Nations, 24 1945 Statute of the International Court of Justice (Annexed to the Charter of the United Nations), 12 1945 London Agreement for the Establishment of an International Military Tribunal, 302 1945 Charter of the International Military Tribunal – Nürnberg (Annexed to the London 1945 Agreement for the Establishment of an International Military Tribunal), 302, 478 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 25, 80, 441, 480 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 92 1948 Geneva Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in 1949 Armed Forces in the Field, 83 Art. 25, at 192 common Art. 49/50/129/146, at common Art. 1, at 84, 166 Art. 28, at 192 85, 92, 94–5, 303, 332 *common Art. 2 Art. 29, at 192 common Art. 50/51/130/147, at *common Art. 3 Art. 30, at 192, 259, 268 93-4, 309, 446 Art. 8, at 85, 259 common Art. 63/62/142/158, at Art. 33, at 259, 269 Art. 12, at 85, 329 Art. 34, at 259, 268 82 Art. 13, at 192, 212 Art. 41, at 192 Art. 50, at 259 Art. 15, at 327 common Art. 47/48/127/144, at Art. 65, at 192 Art. 19, at 319, 524 331, 361 Art. 22, at 192, 193 Geneva Convention (II) for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea, 83 Art. 8, at 85, 259 Art. 18, at 327 Art. 28, at 259, 269 Art. 51, at 259 Geneva Convention (III) Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 81, 83 Art. 4A, at 195, 241, 244, Art. 4A.(6), at 200, 240–1, 245, Art. 42, at 314 Art. 44, at 105 245, 295 299 Art. 4A.(1), at 213, 232, Art. 4B, at 202 Art. 76, at 259, 268 240, 244, 299 Art. 5, at 214, 228–31, 235, 238, Art. 85, at 221 Art. 94, at 303 Art. 4A.(2), at 125, 220, 245-9 Art. 96, at 303 240-1, 244, 299 Art. 8, at 85, 259 Art. 120, at 322 Art. 13, at 323–5 Art. 4A.(3), at 195, 198, Art. 123, at 73, 84 Art. 17, at 104–5 240-1, 244, 299 Art. 18, at 309 Art. 126, at 259, 268 Art. 4A.(4), at 198, 240, 244 Art. 23, at 319 Art. 130, at 259 Art. 4A.(5), at 244 Art. 33, at 192 Art. 141, at 323 Art. 35, at 192 Geneva Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War, 23, 25, 44, 83, 1949 106 Art. 4, at 106, 109, 126, Art. 28, at 319 Art. 108, at 259, 268 219, 235–6, 245 Art. 32, at 95 Art. 112, at 259, 268 Art. 33, at 106, 214, 327 Art. 5, at 268 Art. 123, at 84 Art. 9, at 85, 259 Art. 34, at 317 Art. 130, at 322 Arts. 13–26, at 234, 252 Art. 49, at 106, 259, 268 Art. 140, at 73, 84 Art. 16, at 327 Art. 53, at 44, 259, 268, Art. 143, at 259, 268 Art. 18, at 527, 552 552-3 Art. 147, at 95, 259, 317, 320, Art. 19, at 295, 527 Art. 55, at 259 477, 552, 567 Art. 70, at 106 Art. 27, at 95, 106, 311, Arts. 71-75, at 106

^{*} Common Articles 2 and 3 appear throughout the text, too frequently to list individually. Basic coverage of common Article 2 is provided on pages 180 and 218, common Article 3 on pages 96–104.



Table of Treaties xxiii

```
European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 457,
1950
          467, 478, 480
        Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict,
1954
          316, 536, 556–76
       Art. 1, at 559, 571
        Art. 4, at 560, 575
        Art. 7, at 560
        Art. 8, at 560-1
        Art. 11, at 560
        Art. 16, at 561
        Art. 25, at 560
        1954 First Protocol, at 563
        1999 Second Protocol, at 561, 564-5
        International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 25, 237, 476, 480
1966
1968
        United Nations Convention on the Non-Application of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes
          and Crimes Against Humanity, 303
        Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 14
1969
        United Nations Convention on the Prohibition of Development, Production and Stockpiling
1971
          of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, 556, 605-11,
       United Nations Convention on the Prohibition of Military Or Other Hostile Use of
          Environmental Modification Techniques, 526, 556
        Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the
          Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol I), 14
        Art. 1.1, at 123
                                     Art. 43.1, at 126, 212–13
                                                                           Art. 55, at 526–7
        Art. 1.3, at 150
                                     Art. 43.2, at 42, 188, 193
                                                                           Art. 56, at 530
                                                                           Art. 56.1, at 528
                                     Art. 44, at 126–7, 129, 430
        Art. 1.4, at 123, 141,
                                                                           Art. 56.2, at 529
                                     Art. 44.3, at 126–7, 129, 254
          150
                                     Art. 44.4, at 126, 209
                                                                           Art. 57, at 122, 273, 520
        Art. 3, at 542
                                     Art. 45.1, at 214, 228
                                                                           Art. 57.2 (a), at 520
        Art. 4.2, at 327
                                     Art. 45.3, at 233
                                                                           Art. 57.2 (b), at 122, 273
        Art. 10, at 213
                                     Art. 47, at 123
                                                                           Art. 58, at 275, 285, 296
        Art. 11, at 94, 121,
                                     Art. 48, at 122–3, 209, 252, 254,
                                                                           Art. 59, at 526
          213
       Art. 12, at 317
                                        520, 532, 534, 536
                                                                           Art. 62, at 259, 268
       Art. 13.1, at 317, 527
                                     Art. 49, at 520
                                                                           Art. 67, at 123, 259, 269
       Art. 13.2, at 192
                                     Art. 50, at 232, 238, 299, 542,
                                                                           Art. 71, at 259, 268
       Art. 23, at 44
                                        565, 572
                                                                           Art. 72, at 25
                                                                           Art. 75, at 25, 166, 208, 214, 219,
        Art. 24, at 122
                                     Art. 51, at 537
                                     Art. 51.2, at 122, 214, 256, 274,
        Art. 34, at 322
                                                                              233-4, 237, 317, 446, 481-2
        Art. 35.2, at 122, 269
                                                                           Art. 76, at 477
                                        299
                                     Art. 51.3, at 202, 255, 539,
        Art. 35.3, at 526–7
                                                                           Art. 79, at 429
       Art. 36, at 271, 594
                                                                           Art. 82, at 122, 400
                                        541-6
                                     Art. 51.4, at 523, 536
                                                                           Art. 85, at 94, 122, 253, 296,
        Art. 37, at 129, 420,
                                                                              299, 420, 422, 537, 566–7
          422-3, 426, 430
                                     Art. 51.5, at 122, 273
        Art. 38, at 422
                                     Art. 51.7, at 319-20
                                                                           Art. 86.1, at 399
        Art. 39, at 222, 422, 428,
                                     Art. 52, at 299, 547
                                                                           Art. 86.2, at 122, 399, 400
           430, 432-3
                                     Art. 52.2, at 520, 524
                                                                           Art. 87, at 122, 331, 400
       Art. 40, at 44, 329
                                     Art. 52.3, at 527, 534
                                                                           Art. 88, at 92
        Art. 41, at 329
                                     Art. 53, at 309, 316, 563, 565–7,
                                                                           Art. 96, at 128, 168
        Art. 42, at 122, 524
                                         571
                                     Art. 54, at 259, 269
        Art. 43, at 299
       Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the
```

Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Additional Protocol II), 14



> Table of Treaties xxiv Art. 1.1, at 131, 219 Art. 4.2, at 317, 446, 448, 477 Art. 14, at 131 Art. 1.2, at 130, 172 Art. 4.3, at 130 Art. 15, at 528 Art. 16, at 309, 563, 565, 567, Art. 6, at 25, 131 Art. 2, at 214, 234 Art. 11, at 527 Art. 4, at 214, 482 Art. 4.1, at 130, 477 Art. 12, at 422 Art. 17, at 259, 268 Art. 13, at 214, 252 United Nations International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages, 318 1070 Geneva Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional 1980 Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, 271, 556, 577-99 1980 Protocol I, Concerning Non-detectable Fragments, at 580-1 1980 Protocol II, Concerning Mines and Booby-traps, 581-3 1996 Amended Mines Protocol II, at 424, 524, 579, 583-4 1980 Protocol III, Concerning Incendiary Weapons, at 524, 585-6, 599 1995 Protocol IV, Concerning Blinding Laser Weapons, at 586-8 2003 Protocol V, Concerning Explosive Remnants of War, at 588–90, 595 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 15, 26, 237, 440, 466, 475–8, 481 Art. 1, at 441, 446, 480 Art. 2, at 15, 72, 442 Art. 7, at 92 Art. 17, at 457 Optional Protocol Establishing a Sub-committee for the Prevention of Torture (effective 2006), at 440 1987 Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Punish Torture, 476 Turku/Åbo Declaration of Minimum Humanitarian Standards, 618 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons, 556, 599, 605, 610–16, 620–1 Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, S/Res/808 (1993), U.N. Doc. S/25704 (May 3, 1993) Art. 2, at 474 Art. 3, at 474 Art. 4, at 448, 482 Art. 5, at 311, 474, 478 Art. 7, at 400, 402, 410 Art. 18, at 535 Art. 86, at 410 Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, 15, 556, 584 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 15, 317 1998 Art. 5, at 297-8 Art. 8 (2), at 302 Art. 8 (2)(a), at 318, 447 Art. 8 (2)(b), at 22, 56, 274, 311, 319, 327, 421, 526, 558, 602 Art. 8 (2)(c), at 100, 318, 447 Art. 8 (2)(e), at 22, 100-1, 311, 421, 558 Art. 28, at 400 Art. 31, at 378 Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the 2005 Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem (Additional Protocol III), at 136-7, 422 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or 2006 Punishment: Optional Protocol, 440 Convention on Cluster Munitions (Dublin), at 592-3

2008



Foreword

In 1998, after arriving at West Point for assignment as the United States Military Academy's Staff Judge Advocate, I was selected to be Professor and Head of West Point's Department of Law. That's when I had the good fortune of meeting Professor Gary Solis, with whom I began a personal and professional relationship that has been one of the highlights of my career.

Professor Solis, a retired United States Marine, had revitalized a moribund Law of War program in the Department of Law and created the first elective at the Military Academy on that topic. Because I had come from recent operational law assignments, the subject area was of great interest to me, and we frequently talked about related issues, both historical and contemporary. After I moved to the Department of Law, we continued to develop our shared interest and, on occasion, we had the chance to teach the elective together. When Gary left his professorial position in the summer of 2001, I took over the teaching of the course, building on the great foundation he had laid.

Over the next few years, the department asked Professor Solis to return to West Point as Visiting Professor, normally a one-year arrangement. Because of his remarkable contributions, including devising and coordinating an overall cadet program in the law of armed conflict (LOAC) that included practical training exercises as well as classroom instruction, he was asked to stay on as our Visiting Professor for a second year, until he again retired. He continues to return to West Point every semester, and we team teach the introductory class in this essential area that all cadets attend.

During our discussions and teaching, Gary and I would occasionally lament the lack of organized textual material necessary for teaching a course in LOAC, particularly the lack of a good textbook. Anyone involved with international humanitarian law (IHL) – academics, commanders and soldiers, cadets, and concerned citizens – should be delighted that Professor Solis has devoted his expertise to writing that textbook. There is no one more qualified.

Gary Solis has not only studied and taught these principles, he has lived them and advocated their practical application. This textbook reflects an academic apprenticeship that includes a master of laws in criminal law from George Washington Law School and a doctorate in the law of war from the London School of Economics and Political Science. He has previously published two outstanding books on law of war issues related to Vietnam, as well as numerous articles on LOAC topics. He is in demand as a lecturer, commentator, and expert witness on these issues.

This book is shaped by Professor Solis's years of experience in teaching this subject at both the undergraduate and law school levels, and reflects classroom lessons learned.

XXV



xxvi Foreword

Professor Solis has created a book with a clearly stated approach to learning the subject, a textbook organized to lead students from the most basic issues to the more difficult and complex. He includes commonly raised classroom issues, using real-world examples. His military career has provided him with an appreciation and understanding of the material he addresses, rarely found in a textbook. He combines academic rigor and expertise with his experience as a combat Marine to communicate how these issues unfold on the ground.

Before he went to law school, Gary Solis was a young officer in Vietnam, commanding Marines in combat during two tours of duty and serving as a company commander after his predecessor was killed in action. His understanding of LOAC issues is informed not only by those experiences but also by his experience as a judge advocate, which included serving as chief prosecutor in two of the Marine Corps' three divisions, as a military judge, and as the staff judge advocate of a major command. He has participated in more than 700 courts-martial (several involving allegations of violations of the law of war). His active-duty service culminated in a position in which he headed the military law section of the Marine Corps worldwide that earned him recognition for his role in modernizing the *Manual for Courts-Martial*. No one who works on these issues, no one who thinks about them, or has taught them matches Professor Solis's combination of academic thought and scholarship, teaching, and practical experience. He is exactly the person who should write a textbook on law of armed conflict.

As you read this book, you will appreciate that the chapters on conflict status and individual status could only be written by an individual with academic experience in IHL and LOAC. The chapters on command responsibility and rules of engagement could only be composed by a soldier or Marine who has experienced these issues in more than a theoretical setting.

This is a work of mature scholarship, a clearly written guide to IHL and LOAC for the student who comes to the classroom knowing little or nothing of these topics. When Professor Solis and I first discussed these issues, we were greatly interested in them because of our prior experiences, and they were topical because of war crime trials in The Hague. That was prior to September 11, 2001, when the world changed. The events that have occurred in the intervening years, from Iraq to Afghanistan, from Abu Ghraib to Guantanamo, from torture allegations to the treatment of detainees, demonstrate the need for an understanding of the principles of IHL. This book provides that understanding.

Professor Solis's work is historical as well, describing hundreds of cases – in the United States and internationally. He traces the history of concepts, concentrating on significant cases from ancient times to the war on terrorism. He artfully mixes legal and military history, recognizing that we can't know where we are without understanding where we've been. The thousands of footnotes, which allow interested readers to locate further readings on almost any topic discussed, include a wide range of source materials, from law review articles to academic texts and military documents, and even a reference to *Dr. Strangelove*. This textbook also includes material from Professor Solis's personal files and unpublished trial records and military reports not available anywhere else.

In his approach to difficult issues, Professor Solis never soft-pedals miscalculations by the political and military leaders of the United States or excuses their often poorly considered positions in the so-called war on terrorism. The chapter on torture should be a guide to military and civilian leadership.



Foreword xxvii

Every professor and teacher with classes in international law, national security law, or any aspect of the war on terrorism – in undergraduate institutions to graduate programs to law schools – will profit by using this book. The broad coverage of essential IHL should make this book a *vade mecum* for upper-division undergraduate students, as well as those in law school. This book is an excellent resource for military officers of all grades and is absolutely indispensable for every deployed judge advocate. Any tactical legal advisor should make sure that this book is the first item packed in the rucksack. Legal advisors and other users can take advantage of the comprehensive table of contents, which allows the reader to quickly locate significant points of law of war and IHL.

Any textbook covering complex and emerging questions, with issues and answers still being argued and formed, is bound to include arguable points and occasional errors. Professor Solis does not shy away from gray or unsettled areas. He takes clearly stated positions based on experience, expertise, and best interpretations of the law. In doing so, he provides clear guidelines to students and other users.

Professor Gary Solis made a lasting impact on the Law of War program at the United States Military Academy at West Point, ensuring that the next generation of our Army's leaders understand and appreciate LOAC and IHL. His efforts enabled those young men and women to realize and inculcate the guidelines that control our actions in armed conflict and the essential principles and values that underpin these laws and requirements. Because of his contributions, Professor Solis is one of the very few honorary members of West Point's Association of Graduates. With this outstanding textbook, Professor Solis makes a broad contribution to the study of an area of the law that is critical to the manner in which countries, armed forces, and individuals conduct themselves. It is likely to have an impact that will last for decades.

Patrick Finnegan Brigadier General, United States Army Dean of the Academic Board United States Military Academy West Point, New York



Preface

It used to be a simple thing to fight a battle. . . . In a perfect world, a general would get up and say, "Follow me, men," and everybody would say, "Aye, sir" and would run off. But that's not the world anymore. . . . [Now] you have to have a lawyer or a dozen.

General James L. Jones, U.S. Marine Corps, while Supreme Allied Commander, Europe

This is a textbook for law students and upper-division undergraduates. A military background is not required. The text takes the interested reader from the essentials of the law of armed conflict (LOAC) to an awareness of some finer points of battlefield law. The text refers to hundreds of cases, including American courts-martial. Many are dealt with in detail, most only in passing, but all contribute to an understanding of LOAC or, as civilians refer to it, international humanitarian law (IHC). (I often follow the lead of the Geneva Conventions in referring to it as the law of armed conflict.) The text concentrates exclusively on *jus in bello* – law on the battlefield – to the exclusion of *jus ad bellum*, the lawfulness of the resort to force. It does not include law of war at sea or law of air warfare.

This is not a national security law text nor a history book, nor an ethics study. Elements of those are inextricably included, particularly history, but they are not the main focus. The essentials are here: Exactly, what are "the law of armed conflict" and "international humanitarian law"? What LOAC/IHL applies to particular armed conflicts? What is the legal status of the participants in an armed conflict? What constitutes a war crime? What is a lawful target, and how are targeting decisions made? What are rules of engagement, and what role do they play on the battlefield? Torture is defined and its futility explained. The text is liberally footnoted so that readers will have a broad reference base if they wish to study an issue more deeply.

The book was born in the classrooms of the United States Military Academy and shaped in Georgetown University Law Center seminars. At West Point, knowing that my cadet students would soon put these lessons into practice in combat gave focus to the book's formation. Discussing and arguing LOAC/IHL issues with soldiers and Marines fresh from duty in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Africa honed arguments and conclusions in the text. My twenty-six-year Marine Corps career provided insights as well.

xxix

¹ Lyric Wallwork, "A Marine's toughest mission," Parade Magazine, Jan. 19, 2003.



xxx Preface

Some will disagree with interpretations included here. Occasionally, conclusions are drawn when international consensus may not be fully formed – little in public international law is clearly black or white. That is not to suggest that one should form conclusions merely for the sake of dispelling ambiguity. Where the weight of authority in my view indicates a conclusion in an unsettled area, that conclusion is stated. Appellate opinions and legal materials are included to illustrate how *jus in bello* concepts have been applied.

LOAC/IHL is not particularly arcane or complex but, contrary to the expectations of some, neither is it merely instinctive. One cannot "know" the law of war through a cursory presumption of what sounds morally right or wrong. In a few courses offered at some universities and law schools, LOAC/IHL is little more than an international law course with a couple of lessons on the Geneva Conventions added to it. It's not that easy. Still, in its general outlines, LOAC/IHL is a relatively narrow aspect of public international law, not particularly arduous or opaque.

In a world where combat is broadcast worldwide in real time, warfighters are expected to meet a high standard of conduct and judgment. In unclear situations, when death is the rule and violence the norm, how do combatants decide, instantly and under fire, what is right and what is wrong — not only morally, but legally? A knowledge of LOAC/IHL provides some of the answers.

The text is heavily United States weighted, but it is more than a statement solely of American positions. It incorporates lessons from the British, Dutch, Israelis, and others. Cases from around the world are included. Some recent U.S. LOAC/IHL positions have been, to phrase it gently, open to question. Those are discussed as well.

My hope is that this textbook will contribute to the betterment of armed forces everywhere and to the intellectual understanding of students, civilian and military, who read it.



Acknowledgments

Thank you to my good friend and mentor, Brigadier General Patrick Finnegan, West Point's Academic Dean. His unwavering support of the United States Military Academy's Law of War instruction, his experience in applying that law in combat zones around the world, and his expert teaching of the subject set the moral climate and academic tone for a generation of Army officers-to-be.

Colonels Dave Wallace and Fred Borch have been unwaveringly supportive and the best of brothers. My frequent advisor, Colonel Hays Parks, LOAC scholar, prolific writer, shooter of anything with a trigger, and Marine Corps friend for more than thirty years, is in a singular class.

In writing this text, I could not have had a better guide and advisor than John Berger, Cambridge University Press Senior Editor. I also thank my editor, Eleanor Umali, and copy editor, Susan Sweeney. Their patient, insightful, and painstaking work greatly improved my writing. And to Andrea, ever patient, always understanding, and endlessly supportive, "thank you" will never be enough.

Institutions that have supported me and encouraged the broader teaching of law of armed conflict/international humanitarian law (LOAC/IHL) include the United States Military Academy, which understands the critical need to teach young officers the law of war and continually presses for its advancement, and Quantico's Marine Corps University, which strives to ensure that Marine combat leaders understand and follow the law of war. The International Institute of Humanitarian Law, in Sanremo, Italy, and the Army's Judge Advocate General's Center and School provide a teaching platform and a bully pulpit for me. The International Committee of the Red Cross, with advice and materials, has generously supported my teaching efforts and those of many others who seek to get the IHL word out. Thank you all.

I do not have a research assistant. Any mistakes in this text are mine alone.