

Saudi Arabia, Use of the Red Cross Emblem by United States Forces

[Source: Tisdall, S. with the 44th US Medical Brigade, Saudi Arabia, *The Guardian*, September 8, 1990]

N.B. As per the [disclaimer](#), neither the ICRC nor the authors can be identified with the opinions expressed in the Cases and Documents. Some cases even come to solutions that clearly violate IHL. They are nevertheless worthy of discussion, if only to raise a challenge to display more humanity in armed conflicts. **Similarly, in some of the texts used in the case studies, the facts may not always be proven;** nevertheless, they have been selected because they highlight interesting IHL issues and are thus published for didactic purposes.

Hospitals Appear on Desert Sands

US FORCES in eastern Saudi Arabia are rapidly establishing an elaborate network of field hospitals, forward clearing stations and mobile medical evacuation units capable of dealing with thousands of American casualties in the event of war with Iraq. [...]

The Saudi government is providing separate medical facilities for its troops. The US hospitals are not allowed to display the Red Cross to signify their presence to an enemy. In a country where Christian emblems are banned, they have been asked to use the Red Crescent.

Discussion

1. Who may use the emblem? In which circumstances and under what conditions? What is the purpose of the emblem? May military forces use it? ([GC I, Arts 42 and 44](#); [GC II, Art. 44](#); [P I, Art. 18](#))
2. a. Are emblems other than the red cross protected by the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols? Which ones? Who may use these other emblems? ([GC I, Art. 38](#); [GC II, Art. 41](#); [P I, Art. 8\(I\)](#); [P I, Annex I, Arts 4-5](#); [P II, Art. 12](#); [P III](#))
b. May US military medical facilities lawfully use the red crescent emblem? May they use the red cross even in a country using the red crescent? Only with the permission of that country? Could US medical facilities, if in the service of Saudi Arabia, then use the red crescent emblem? ([GC I, Arts 27, 38, 42\(4\)](#) and [43](#); [P II, Art. 12](#))
c. If the US military medical facilities here are prohibited from displaying either emblem, how are they to indicate their presence to an enemy? If they do not display the emblem, do the medical facilities still retain their protected status under IHL?
3. a. Why has the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement encountered problems arising from a plurality of protective emblems? Are they related to a perception of the red cross emblem as a Christian symbol? Is the non-religious connotation of the red cross emblem harder to claim since acceptance of the second emblem, the red crescent? What effect does this have on the principle of universality? [See [ICRC, The Question of the Emblem](#)]
b. What dangers to the emblem's authority arise from the use of several different emblems? Could a plurality of emblems not undermine the protection it provides? Particularly its essential neutrality?