The term refers to the means and methods of warfare employed by belligerents in armed conflicts. The IHL rules on conduct of hostilities aim to strike a balance between military necessity and humanity, seeking mainly to protect civilians from attacks and effects of hostilities, but equally to limit the suffering of combatants. Key principles of IHL governing the conduct of hostilities include: distinction, proportionality, precautions, and prohibition of superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering.

See Distinction; Proportionality; Precautions in attack; Means of warfare; Methods of warfare; Military objectives; Civilian objects; Fighters; Direct participation in hostilities; Naval warfare; Law enforcement; Superfluous injury;
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