A “reprisal” is a breach of international humanitarian law, which would otherwise be unlawful but in exceptional cases is considered lawful as an enforcement measure in response to a previous breach of international humanitarian law by the enemy, with the purpose of terminating the enemy’s violation. Thus, reprisals are intended to put pressure on the enemy in order to obtain the enemy's compliance with international humanitarian law. Reprisals are only allowed under very strict conditions and there is a trend towards outlawing reprisals in international humanitarian law.

Reprisals against wounded, sick [1] or shipwrecked [2] persons, medical [3] or religious personnel [4], medical units, transports and material, prisoners of war [5], the civilian population [6] and civilian persons, civilian objects [7], cultural property [8], objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population [9], the natural environment [10], works and installations containing dangerous forces [11] and the buildings and material used for the protection of the civilian population [6] are always prohibited.
Chapter 13, IX. 2. c) admissibility of reprisals

**LEGAL SOURCE**

**prohibition**

- against protected persons
  - GCI, 46 [14] (see ICRC updated Commentary [15])
  - GCII, 47 [16] (see ICRC updated Commentary [17])
  - GCIII, 13/3 [18]
  - GCIV, 33/3 [19]
  - PI, 20 [20]
  - CIHL, 146 [21]

- against civilian population
  - PI, 51/6 [22]

- against civilian objects
  - PI, 52/1 [23], 53/c [24], 54/4 [25], 55/2 [26], 56/4 [27]
CIHL, 147

in NIAC

CIHL, 148

limited admissibility

CIHL, 145

DOCUMENTS

Switzerland, Prohibition of the Use of Chemical Weapons (Para. 2)

Germany/United Kingdom, Shackling of Prisoners of War

CASES

International Law Commission, Articles on State Responsibility (Part A., Arts 49, 50 and 51 and Para. 8 of the commentary of Art. 50)

Belgium, Law on Universal Jurisdiction (Part A., Art. 136(g))

United Kingdom and Australia, Applicability of Protocol I (Part C)

United States, President Rejects Protocol I
Israel, Cheikh Obeid et al. v. Ministry of Security

ICRC, Iran/Iraq Memoranda


ICTY, The Prosecutor v. Kupreskic et al. (Paras. 517-536)

Democratic Republic of the Congo, Conflict in the Kivus (Part III, Paras. 12-23, 37)

Israel, Blockade of Gaza and the Flotilla Incident

European Court of Human Rights, Kononov v. Latvia

ICTY, The Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadzic

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Suggested readings:


**Further readings:**


**Source URL:** https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/reprisals

**Links**

[8] https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/cultural-property
[38] https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/united-states-president-rejects-protocol-i
[40] https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/icrc-iraniraq-memoranda
[41] https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/icty-prosecutor-v-martic
[42] https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/icty-prosecutor-v-martic#part_8
[43] https://casebook.icrc.org/case-study/icty-prosecutor-v-martic#part_b_para_464