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.

**OUTLINE**

Chapter 9, II. 6. d) attacks against the civilian population (or civilian objects) by way of reprisals\(^{12}\)
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 [28]

in NIAC

CIHL, 148 [29]

limited admissibility

CIHL, 145 [30]

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Switzerland, Prohibition of the Use of Chemical Weapons (Para. 2) [31]

Germany/United Kingdom, Shackling of Prisoners of War [32]

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International Law Commission, Articles on State Responsibility [33] (Part A., Arts 49, 50 and 51 [34] and Para. 8 of the commentary of Art. 50 [35])

Belgium, Law on Universal Jurisdiction (Part A., Art. 136(g)) [36]

United Kingdom and Australia, Applicability of Protocol I (Part C) [37]

United States, President Rejects Protocol I [38]
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ICRC, Iran/Iraq Memoranda [40]


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European Court of Human Rights, Kononov v. Latvia [47]

ICTY, The Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadzic [48]

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Suggested readings:


**Further readings:**


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

**Links**

[8] https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/cultural-property