The tactics or strategy used in hostilities to defeat the enemy by using available information on him together with weapons\(^1\), movement and surprise. International law has sanctioned the following principles regarding means and methods of warfare:

a. the only legitimate object of war is to weaken the enemy’s military forces, for which purpose it is sufficient to disable the greatest possible number of enemy combatants\(^2\);

b. the right to choose methods and means of warfare\(^3\) is not unlimited;

c. it is prohibited to employ methods (and means) of warfare of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering\(^4\);

d. in the study, development, acquisition or adoption of new means or methods of warfare it must be determined whether their employment is not prohibited in some or all circumstances.

Prohibited methods of warfare include perfidy\(^5\), terror\(^6\), starvation\(^7\), reprisals\(^8\) against non-military objectives, and indiscriminate attacks\(^9\), damage to the natural environment\(^10\) or to works and installations containing dangerous forces\(^11\); ordering that there shall be no survivors; pillage\(^12\); taking hostages\(^13\); taking advantage of the presence of the civilian population or population movements\(^14\) to promote the conduct of hostilities; improper use of distinctive emblems\(^15\) and signs; and attacks on persons hors de combat\(^16\) or parachuting\(^17\) from an aircraft\(^18\) in distress.
Chapter 9, III, Means and Methods of Warfare

Chapter 9. III. 3. Prohibited methods of warfare

CASES

Colombia, Constitutionality of IHL Implementing Legislation

Afghanistan, Code of Conduct for the Mujahideen

Georgia/Russia, Human Rights Watch’s Report on the Conflict in South Ossetia

Georgia/Russia, Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in South Ossetia

British Policy Towards German Shipwrecked

Belgium, Public Prosecutor v. G.W.

Israel, Navy Sinks Dinghy off Lebanon

ICRC, Iran/Iraq Memoranda
United States, Surrendering in the Persian Gulf War [40]

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Tablada (Paras. 182-185) [41]

Civil War in Nepal [42]

United States Military Court in Germany, Trial of Skorzeny and Others [43]

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Using Uniforms of Peacekeepers [44]

Angola, Famine as a Weapon [45]

Cambodia/Thailand, Border Conflict around the Temple of Preah Vihear [46]

Iran, Victim of Cyber warfare [47]

Yemen, Potential Existence and Effects of Naval Blockade [48]

Sri Lanka, Naval War against Tamil Tigers [49]

ICRC, Statement - War in Cities ; What is at Stake? [50]

Belgium, Prosecution of Terrorist Crimes in the context of Armed Conflict [51]

Syria, Syrian rebels treat captured Filipino soldiers as 'guests' [52]

Central African Republic/Democratic Republic of Congo/Uganda, LRA attacks [53]
BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES


Source URL: https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/methods-warfare

Links