

Placing the Protection of Civilians at the Heart of Military Operations

Conference on the Protection of Civilians in Military Operations

Co-organized by the IRSEM and CIVIC

Tuesday, 17 December 2019

Amphitéâtre Lacoste, École militaire, Paris

In 2019, we celebrated the anniversaries of several seminal developments in the protection of civilians (POC) – the 70th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, a cornerstone of international humanitarian law (IHL), the 20th anniversary of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict being placed as an item on the United Nations (UN) Security Council's agenda, and the 20th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1265, the first-ever resolution on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Additionally, the Security Council passed in October 1999 Resolution 1270, which included the first explicit mandate for a UN peacekeeping operation to protect civilians under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

The anniversaries of these important developments come at a time when multilateralism and the rules-based international order are under threat. The norms and laws that safeguard humanity are increasingly flouted in armed conflict or undermined in the halls of power. At the same time, the number of violent conflicts underway is greater than at any point over the past 30 years – and civilians caught in these conflicts are paying the highest price. In this context, initiatives such as the joint “Humanitarian Call for Action” in New York launched by the German and French Foreign Ministers on April 1st 2019 to ensure that IHL is fully respected in conflict zones are as rare as they are welcome.

While European governments are facing growing tensions affecting their security and defense environment, it is crucial that they keep prioritizing the protection of civilians in their own military operations, as well as in their engagement with partner forces whom they train and assist.

The IRSEM and CIVIC are convening a one-day event that will explore what bettering the protection of civilians in military operations means in practice, and what concrete approaches, policies, and tools can be considered by militaries and governments to meaningfully translate words into concrete actions to protect civilians caught in the midst of conflict.

This event is willing to open an enriching and comprehensive dialogue between militaries, diplomats, civil society representatives, the private sector, and academics, and will seek to provide an international perspective on POC through contributions from NATO, the US, the UK, France and others.

Program

9:00 – 9:15. Coffee and Welcome

9:15 – 9:45. Keynote: Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, Director, IRSEM; Beatrice Godefroy, Europe Director, CIVIC

9:45 – 11:15. Panel 1. The Protection of Civilians: a Multi-faceted Approach between Law, Humanitarianism, and Military Efficiency

This panel will set the stage and respond to the following questions: what does “protection of civilians” mean for the military? How does it relate (and what does it add) to international humanitarian law and international human rights law? What is the relevance of the protection of civilians from the perspective of military efficiency? Speakers will provide different perspectives on the protection of civilians and discuss how, through the practical implementation of IHL provisions, the protection of civilians can provide tools and approaches that create a higher compliance, while being fully integrated into the planning and conduct of

military operations. It will also explore a specific component of POC that is civilian harm mitigation, including civilian casualty tracking, analysis, and response.

Moderator: François Delerue, Researcher in Cyberdefense and International Law, IRSEM

Speakers: Eva Svoboda (ICRC, Deputy Director IHL and Policy Department), Colonel Rudolph Stamminger (Legal Affairs Department, Ministry for the Armed Forces, France), Steven Hill (Legal Advisor and Director, Office of Legal Affairs, NATO), Daniel Mahanty (CIVIC, Director US Program)

11:15 - 11:30: BREAK

11:30 – 13:15. Panel 2. Partnered Military Operations, Security Force Assistance, and the Protection of Civilians: Practices in the Sahel

Partnered Military Operations in the pursuit of shared interests have become common practice over the past few years. Major international military contributors like France, the US, and the UK work with local military partners to counter terrorist groups. These military partnerships may differ in size and shape, from “train and equip missions,” to logistics and intelligence support and joint combat operations. While creating risks, these partnerships may also offer opportunities for the protection of civilians depending on how POC is prioritized (or not) in the partnership and which safeguards are being put in place. The panel will discuss French and American approaches to military partnerships, and, to date, their different perspectives on the protection of civilians in partnered military operations, looking at the specific example of the Sahel.

Moderator: Edouard Jolly, Researcher Theory of Armed Conflicts, IRSEM

Speakers: General Philippe Adam (Former Deputy Commander, Barkhane Operation), Mr. (Colonel retired) Mark David “Max” Maxwell (U.S. Africa Command, Deputy Legal Counsel), Vianney Bisimwa (CIVIC, Regional Director, G5 Sahel program), Denis Tull (IRSEM, Researcher West Africa)

13:15 -14:30: LUNCH

14:30 - 15:45. Panel 3. The Protection of Civilians in the Activities of Private Security and Military Contractors in Armed Conflicts: How to mitigate Risks for Civilians?

Non-state actors play an increasing role in unstable and conflict contexts. This includes private military and security contractors who have benefitted from the exponential trend of outsourcing of security and defense activities such as training, logistical support, intelligence, or infrastructure protection by armed forces and governments since the end of the Cold War. PMSCs also play an important role on protecting state and non-state clients engaged in relief, recovery, and reconstruction efforts, commercial business operations, diplomacy and military activities. As this trend is likely to keep growing in over the next decade, the challenges it creates for the protection of civilians need to be further explored, acknowledged, and mitigated. Clients, governments, civil society, and the industry all have a role to play to further frame and monitor PMSCs’ activities in conflict, and create potential opportunities for better civilian protection.

Moderator: Caroline Fournet, Professor of comparative criminal law and international justice, University of Groningen

Speakers: Candace Rondeaux (Professor of Practice in the School of Politics and Global Studies at Arizona State University and Senior Fellow with the Center on the Future of War)
Arnaud Dessenne (CEO, ERYSS Group), a representative from the French authorities (to be confirmed)

15:45 – 16:15. Conclusion

Key highlights, and relevant points for participants to take-away from the conference:

- Manuel Lafont Rapnouil, CAPS (to be confirmed)
- Beatrice Godefroy, Europe Director, CIVIC

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