

Protection of Civilians and Civilian Populations under IHL: A Critical Observation

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Abstract

The Protection of Civilians (PoC) is a critical dimension of modern conflict management but remains a complex and persistent challenge. PoC efforts often involve targeted protection strategies, particularly through peacekeeping operations mandated by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). These operations typically prioritize certain civilian groups, leaving a significant portion of civilians in conflict zones without adequate protection. The normative and operational frameworks guiding PoC under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) are complemented by the roles of various actors, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), host states, regional organizations, and troop-contributing countries. However, the rising number of civilian casualties in conflict-prone regions highlights the limitations of IHL in ensuring effective humanitarian assistance and civilian protection. This article critically examines these limitations and explores potential pathways for strengthening PoC mechanisms to better mitigate threats to civilians in contemporary armed conflicts. Despite IHL's strong normative framework for PoC, its practical implementation is often undermined by political constraints, doctrinal ambiguities, and operational inefficiencies. This paper argues that bridging the implementation gap requires a multidimensional strategy, including legal reform, improved inter-agency coordination, integration of primary data, and enhanced accountability mechanisms. These efforts must be tailored to the complexities of modern conflict zones, particularly in Africa.

Keywords

Conflict Management, Protection of Civilians, International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

1. Introduction

International Humanitarian Law (IHL), particularly through the Geneva Conventions, recognizes and enshrines protections for civilians during armed conflict. According to Protocol I (Article 50), civilians are defined as individuals who are not members of the armed forces or combatants. However, the effectiveness of IHL in ensuring civilian protection is increasingly being questioned. Since 2009, international conferences have sought to reassert the role of PoC (Protection of Civilians) within the IHL framework, emphasizing collaboration among UN agencies, civil society, and regional actors. Nevertheless, persistent challenges remain due to varying interpretations, political interests, and operational priorities among stakeholders, especially regarding the involvement of military forces in humanitarian protection.

IHL, alongside NGOs, has expanded normative frameworks for civilian protection through collaboration with institutions across the humanitarian and human rights fields. The normative foundation for protecting civilians in war has deep historical roots, reinforced by the evolution of IHL, refugee law, and human rights law, as well as the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Over time, IHL has evolved to address various aspects of armed conflict, including the protection of civilians (PoC), the status and treatment of prisoners of war (POWs), and the care of the wounded, sick, and shipwrecked. These developments reflect a holistic approach aimed at preventing the suffering of victims, safeguarding those not participating in hostilities, and regulating the means and methods of warfare. These principles form the basis of modern civilian protection and broader humanitarian goals.

Political variables have further complicated civilian protection, especially in both international and non-international armed conflicts. Humanitarian assistance often intersects with political considerations involving actors such as the UN Security Council (UNSC), host states, regional bodies, and troop-contributing countries (TCCs). These dynamics form a complex “game” of multilateral engagement in PoC operations. The increasing securitization of humanitarian aid and the politicization of civilian protection underscore the challenges of implementing IHL norms in practice. Consequently, the international policy landscape has placed greater emphasis on the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) doctrine and the integration of humanitarian action into broader political agendas. In the Historical context, the concept of protecting civilians during armed conflict has evolved significantly over time and is rooted in long-standing humanitarian principles. One of the earliest milestones was the work of Henri Dunant, whose experiences during the Battle of Solferino in 1859 led to the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the adoption of the First Geneva Convention in 1864. Although initially focused on treating wounded soldiers, these early treaties laid the foundation for broader civilian protections. The widespread targeting of civilians during the World Wars, particularly during World War II, highlighted the need for more comprehensive legal safeguards. In response, the 1949 Geneva

Conventions were adopted, with the Fourth Convention specifically addressing the protection of civilians in times of war. This was a watershed moment in the development of IHL. The 1977 Additional Protocols further refined these protections by clearly distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants and prohibiting indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations.

As the nature of conflict has changed, marked by the rise of internal armed conflicts, non-state actors, and asymmetrical warfare, the international community has attempted to adapt legal norms to these new realities. The post-Cold War era saw a proliferation of United Nations peacekeeping missions with explicit PoC mandates, operationalizing IHL principles on the ground. However, despite these developments, the international community has repeatedly failed to prevent mass atrocities, as seen in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur. These failures underscore the enduring gap between legal commitments and the practical implementation of civilian protection on the ground.

2. Background of the Study

Focusing on the background of the Study of International Humanitarian Law and Protection of Civilians, Civilians-The roots of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the Protection of Civilians (PoC) can be traced to early efforts in the 18th century to codify humane treatment during armed conflict. These principles were further institutionalized with the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the 19th century and the eventual adoption of the Geneva Conventions. The core objectives of IHL are to safeguard non-combatants and regulate the conduct of hostilities to minimize human suffering. Despite the establishment of robust legal norms—especially through the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Additional Protocols—contemporary armed conflicts continue to inflict disproportionate harm on civilian populations. In recent decades, the nature of warfare has transformed significantly. The post-Cold War era has witnessed a rise in intra-state conflicts, asymmetric warfare, and the proliferation of non-state armed groups—all of which challenge the traditional frameworks and implementation of IHL.

In response to these evolving threats, both the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) have developed and operationalized comprehensive PoC strategies. These strategies integrate physical protection with broader rights-based approaches, including promoting compliance with international norms, ensuring safe environments for displaced populations, and enhancing the capacity of peacekeeping operations to respond to imminent threats. However, these initiatives continue to face obstacles due to limited political will, coordination challenges, and inadequate institutional capacity, rendering the effective protection of civilians an enduring challenge in modern conflict zones.

A significant milestone was achieved in 2005 when the UN adopted new resolutions that acknowledged the shifting landscape of conflict and refined its PoC doctrine accordingly. The contemporary PoC framework rests on four pillars: 1)

Integrating civilian protection into political processes; 2) Safeguarding civilians from physical violence; 3) Upholding legal and moral rights-based protections; 4) Fostering protective environments in conflict-affected areas. Nevertheless, the humanitarian toll remains immense. During the Darfur conflict, over 2.2 million people were internally displaced, while in Somalia, approximately 1.1 million IDPs were reported, alongside more than 12,000 refugees and asylum seekers within the country's borders.

3. Geneva Convention IV and the Concept of Protected Persons

Geneva Convention IV and the Concept of Protected Persons-Under Article 4 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, civilians are designated as “protected persons” if, during a conflict or occupation, they find themselves under the authority of a party to the conflict or an occupying power of which they are not nationals. This legal distinction between combatants and civilians is fundamental to ensuring civilian immunity from direct attacks. The Convention further articulates detailed provisions regarding internment, humane treatment, and the responsibilities of occupying powers toward civilian populations. Geneva Convention IV marked a pivotal development in IHL, specifically focusing on the treatment and protection of civilians in conflict zones, especially in occupied territories. It addressed gaps left by earlier treaties and established a more comprehensive legal structure for civilian protection, particularly relevant in the context of modern warfare, which increasingly places civilians in direct harm.

Expanding Operational Mechanisms and Organizational Engagement

The evolution of PoC has been supported by the increasing involvement of both traditional humanitarian organizations, such as the ICRC and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and a widening network of NGOs. As highlighted by O’Callaghan and Pantuliano (2007), protection has become institutionalized as a central pillar of humanitarian response, notably through the UN Cluster Approach, where protection is recognized as one of eleven essential clusters.

NGOs, often embedded within local communities, have cultivated strategic linkages with political and military stakeholders, thereby amplifying their operational influence in civilian protection. PoC has also become an integral component of peacekeeping mandates. According to Holt, Taylor, and Kelly (2009), protecting civilians is vital to maintaining the legitimacy and credibility of peacekeeping missions. Ensuring civilian safety helps earn the trust of local populations and sustains international support for peace efforts. Failures in this domain, as observed in Rwanda, the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Darfur, have frequently led to mission collapse or significant loss of credibility.

4. Evident Civilian Casualties and Displacement

M23 Offensive Since January 2025, the M23 rebel group, reinforced by approximately 4000 Rwandan troops, has escalated its offensive in eastern DRC, seizing major cities such as Goma and Bukavu. This offensive has led to an estimated 7000 deaths and the displacement of over 7 million people, of whom 3.8 million were displaced from North and South Kivu provinces alone. Child Victims of Armed Conflict: Between April 2022 and March 2024, there was an 8% increase in verified violations against children. These included 4006 cases of recruitment and use, 2028 abductions, and 1298 incidents of killing and maiming. Armed groups were responsible for 98% of these violations.

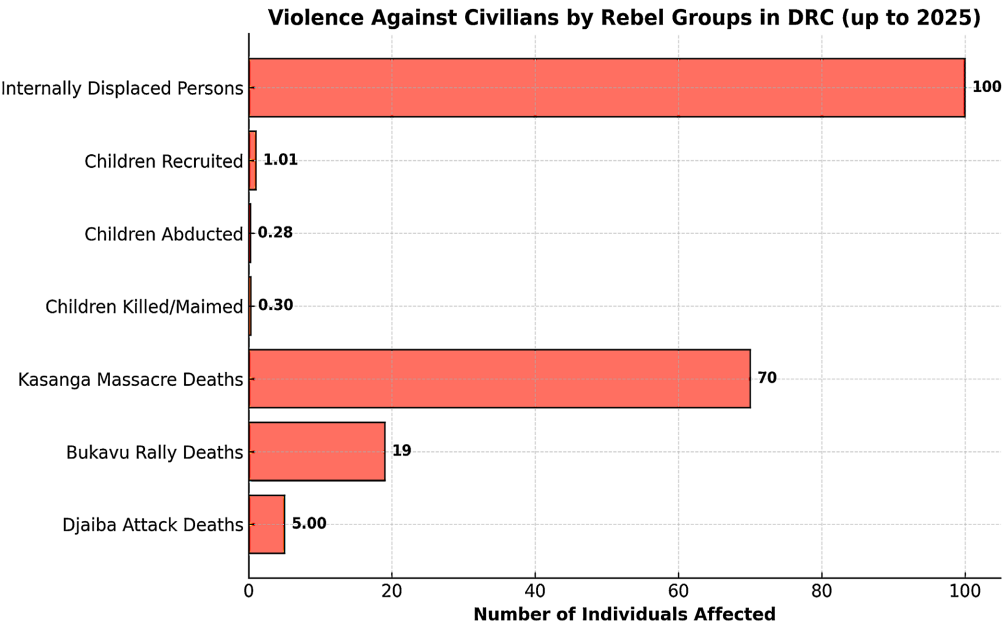
Exemplify the Notable Incidents

- Kasanga Massacre: On February 12, 2025, ADF militants abducted and beheaded 70 Christian civilians inside a church in Kasanga, North Kivu.
- Bukavu Rally Blasts: On February 27, 2025, explosions at an M23 rally in Bukavu killed 13 people and injured many more. Both the Congolese government and M23 rebels have accused each other of orchestrating the attack.

Where Humanitarian Impact: The ongoing conflict has caused widespread humanitarian distress:

- Displacement: Over 7 million people have been displaced, with nearly 780,000 forced to flee between November 2024 and January 2025 alone.
- Attacks on Civilians: In February 2025, CODECO militants killed at least 55 civilians in the Djaiba area of Ituri province.

The situation in the DRC remains critical, with civilians bearing the brunt of violence and instability. While international organizations and regional actors continue efforts to alleviate the crisis, significant gaps remain in achieving lasting peace and ensuring the protection of vulnerable populations.

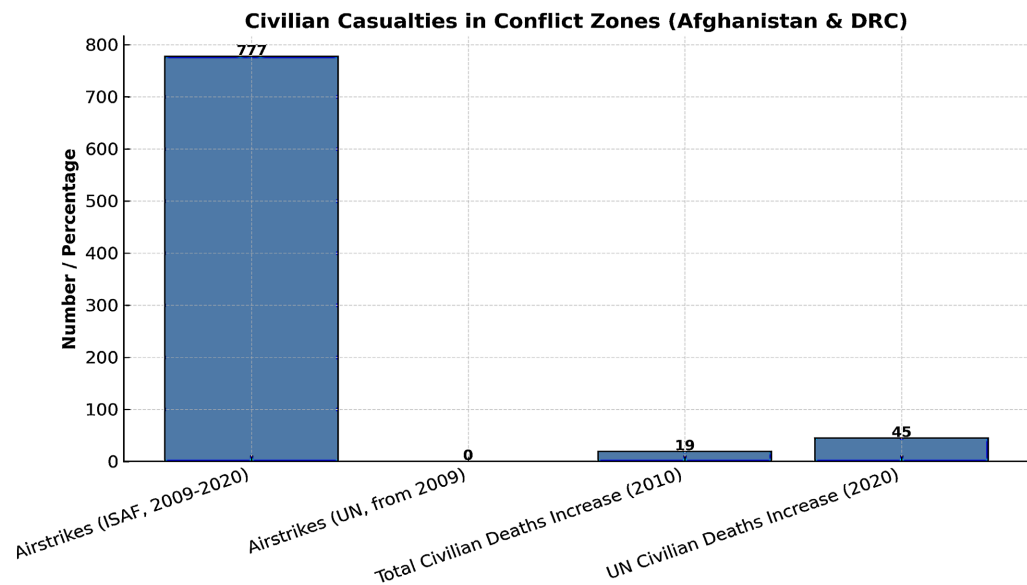


Here's a graphical presentation showing the extent of violence against civilians by rebel groups in the DRC up to 2025. The chart highlights casualties, displacement and specific incidents such as child soldier recruitment and key massacres.

As of highlights, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) continues to endure severe violence against civilians perpetrated by rebel groups, notably the March 23 Movement (M23), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and the Cooperative for the Development of Congo (CODECO). These groups have been responsible for widespread human rights violations, including killings, abductions, sexual violence, and forced displacement. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) began recording civilian deaths in 2007. However, it is only within the past two years that ISAF has systematically categorized these fatalities by specific causes, such as airstrikes and targeted killings. According to Lt. Cmdr. Colette Murphy from ISAF Public Affairs, many civilian casualties likely go unrecorded. Nevertheless, available data suggest that the Taliban is responsible for the vast majority of these deaths.

A report published in *Science* magazine, developed in cooperation with six external analysts, provides a deeper understanding of the conflict. The findings reveal that civilian fatalities increased by 19% in 2010 compared to the previous year, with the highest concentrations occurring during the summer months in the southern provinces, particularly around Kandahar. The United Nations reported a slightly lower increase of 15% in civilian casualties for the same period. Airstrikes accounted for the largest share of military-caused civilian deaths. ISAF documented 136 such deaths over two years; however, this figure represented an 11% decline in 2010. In contrast, the United Nations reported a higher number of 171 civilian deaths due to airstrikes in 2010 alone, although this marked a 50% decrease compared to the previous year. Despite the high toll from airstrikes, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were the leading cause of civilian deaths in 2010, killing 777 individuals. This increase was attributed to the Taliban's escalation of IED use in response to the U.S.-led military surge, which raised the number of deployed troops to 140,000. Meanwhile, in eastern DRC, civilian suffering continues to escalate amid ongoing conflict. The medical humanitarian organization Doctors without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières, or MSF) has treated 66 wounded individuals, mostly civilians, at a hospital in Rutshuru, North Kivu province, since the past weekend. MSF maintains medical operations across multiple conflict-affected areas in the Kivu region.

Patrick Wieland, MSF's head of mission in Kivu, reported that 90% of the recent patients treated at the Rutshuru facility have been civilians. "Most of the injured are women and children from Rutshuru and surrounding villages," Wieland noted. "These mark a shift from earlier patterns, as between April and last week, our hospitals in North and South Kivu were primarily treating wounded combatants and soldiers."



Here's a graphical presentation of civilian casualties in conflict zones based on the ISAF and UN data from Afghanistan, as well as a recent report on the DRC.

5. Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the effectiveness and limitations of the Protection of Civilians (PoC) under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in contemporary armed conflicts. The specific objectives are as follows:

Assessing the normative and operational challenges in implementing PoC mandates includes analyzing the complexities involved in interpreting and enforcing IHL provisions related to civilian protection, as well as the influence of political will, resource constraints, and institutional inconsistencies. IHL provides the legal foundation for civilian protection during armed conflict, yet its practical implementation faces numerous challenges. Political considerations such as the primacy of state sovereignty and competing national interests often obstruct compliance with IHL provisions. Furthermore, the growing involvement of non-state actors, including armed groups and militias, complicates adherence to IHL norms, as these entities may not recognize or respect international legal obligations. Operationally, peacekeeping missions with PoC mandates, such as those in Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo, have struggled to provide effective protection due to ambiguous mandates, insufficient resources, and increasingly volatile security environments. These realities underscore the need for more clearly defined mandates, improved inter-agency coordination, and sufficient logistical and financial support.

To evaluate the role of international institutions, NGOs, and regional actors in protecting civilians. Civilians—This objective focuses on the contributions, coordination efforts, and limitations of various stakeholders, particularly within conflict missions across Africa. International institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) have developed policy frameworks and guide-

lines to enhance PoC operations. Nonetheless, their effectiveness is often undermined by political interference, limited resources, and challenges in harmonizing the roles of different actors. NGOs and humanitarian organizations also play a vital role in civilian protection, but they frequently encounter restricted access to conflict zones, high-security risks, and bureaucratic obstacles. These challenges hamper their ability to deliver humanitarian assistance and enforce protection measures. In regions such as the Sahel, the presence of multiple armed factions and deteriorating security conditions has significantly hindered humanitarian access and disrupted essential services.

To identify gaps in compliance, documentation, and accountability. This objective seeks to explore how deficiencies in monitoring, enforcement, and documentation adversely impact the overall effectiveness of PoC initiatives. Compliance with IHL remains inconsistent, with many violations either undocumented or inadequately addressed. Weak monitoring mechanisms and limited legal enforcement enable perpetrators to act with impunity. International judicial bodies, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), face substantial limitations related to jurisdiction, political constraints, and enforcement capabilities. Additionally, documenting violations poses serious challenges due to restricted access, security concerns, and resource limitations. These factors severely inhibit evidence collection and delay justice for victims of IHL violations.

To propose actionable strategies to strengthen civilian protection frameworks. Based on empirical findings, this objective aims to recommend practical, context-sensitive strategies to enhance training, policymaking, inter-agency collaboration, and technological adoption in PoC operations. Recommended strategies include:

- **Capacity Building:** Providing comprehensive training on IHL principles to military personnel, peacekeepers, and civilian stakeholders to improve compliance and protection standards.
- **Technological Integration:** Utilizing digital tools and surveillance technologies for real-time monitoring, documentation, and reporting of violations to enhance accountability and early warning systems.
- **Policy Reforms:** Crafting clearer, more achievable PoC mandates for peacekeeping missions, supported by adequate funding, equipment, and logistical resources.
- **Enhanced Coordination:** Strengthening collaboration among international bodies, NGOs, and regional actors to streamline operations, share best practices, and reduce duplication of efforts.
- **Strengthening Legal Mechanisms:** Enhancing the jurisdictional reach and enforcement capacity of international and regional judicial bodies to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and that victims receive justice.

6. Research Questions

Based on this study's objectives and content, here are the research questions that align with your analysis of the Protection of Civilians under International Hu-

manitarian Law (IHL):

- 1) How effectively does International Humanitarian Law (IHL) address the protection of civilians in contemporary armed conflicts?
- 2) What are the major institutional, legal, and operational challenges in implementing PoC mandates in conflict-prone regions, especially in Africa?
- 3) How do international organizations, NGOs, and regional actors contribute to or hinder the protection of civilians?
- 4) What reforms or strategies can enhance compliance, documentation, and accountability in civilian protection frameworks?

7. Research Methodology and Research Design

This study employs a qualitative methodology with doctrinal and empirical analysis, using Rwanda, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as case studies. These countries were selected based on three primary criteria: 1) the presence of UN or AU peacekeeping missions with explicit PoC mandates; 2) high civilian casualty rates due to violations of IHL; and 3) the availability of extensive documentation from international and local NGOs. These cases represent varied geopolitical, operational, and humanitarian contexts, allowing for a comparative analysis of PoC effectiveness. Primary data collection, such as interviews with humanitarian actors and field observers, is proposed for future phases of the study to deepen insights into field-level practices, challenges, and perceptions of protection gaps.

Research Design: The research adopts a critical legal research design, integrating doctrinal analysis, case study methodology, and comparative evaluation. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how IHL norms are interpreted and implemented in real-world conflict settings.

7.1. Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Doctrinal Review: Analysis of international legal instruments such as the Geneva Conventions, Additional Protocols, and UN resolutions related to PoC. **Case Studies:** Focused examination of PoC practices in conflict zones, including Rwanda, Somalia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to illustrate patterns of civilian harm and institutional response. **Review of reports, academic literature, peacekeeping evaluations, NGO documentation (e.g., MSF, ICRC), and international monitoring body findings (e.g., ICC, UNHCR).** **Content Analysis:** Thematic assessment of speeches, policy briefs, operational mandates, and training manuals used by peacekeeping missions and humanitarian actors... **Data Analysis through Case Studies of Quantitative and qualitative data from Somalia and the DRC** highlight rising civilian casualties despite ongoing peacekeeping operations. Airstrikes, IEDs, and direct assaults by armed groups are the primary causes of civilian deaths. For example, ISAF data reported a 19% increase in civilian casualties in 2010, while MSF data revealed that 90% of those treated at Rutshuru hospital in DRC were civilians. These statistics reflect systemic failures in current PoC frameworks. **The Comparative Analysis based on the Evaluation of protection frame-**

works across multiple conflict zones to assess effectiveness and draw lessons for institutional reform. Deconstruction of legal texts and policy statements to explore the disjuncture between normative promises and field-level realities.

7.2. Scope and Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Focusing on the Scope and Limitations: The study focuses on Sub-Saharan Africa, where challenges to PoC are most visible, although findings may hold relevance for broader conflict settings. The research is limited by reliance on secondary data, which may reflect biases or incomplete reporting in conflict zones. In regard to Ethical Considerations, this research ensures adherence to ethical standards by relying exclusively on publicly available data and secondary sources. Respecting the confidentiality of conflict-affected populations and avoiding any harm or re-traumatization through data handling.

8. Literature Review

8.1. Mainstreaming PoC in Peace Operations

PoC has become a core benchmark in UN peacekeeping operations and is increasingly recognized by regional organizations such as the AU and NATO. Nonetheless, a major obstacle remains the legitimacy gap between state and non-state actors. While state forces are progressively incorporating PoC into doctrine and training, non-state groups frequently disregard IHL. Institutional commitment, operational clarity, and improved coordination among peacekeepers, humanitarian actors, and host governments are essential for mainstreaming PoC. Application of PoC in Africa: A Case Study, The Oslo Global Conference emphasized practical measures to uphold IHL and reduce civilian harm in African contexts. Recommendations for African Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) and the African Union Commission (AUC) include enhanced training, enforcement of the principles of distinction and proportionality, and improved documentation of operational conduct. Nevertheless, civilians continue to face grave risks due to the volatile nature of the conflict and persistent non-compliance by armed groups.

8.2. Promoting Compliance with IHL

Effective promotion of IHL compliance requires multi-level interventions, including institutional training, public advocacy, legal accountability, and international oversight. Integrating IHL principles into national military doctrines and engaging civil society and media can pressure both state and non-state actors to uphold civilian protections. Institutions like the ICC and UN investigative bodies are critical to ensuring justice and deterring violations.

8.3. Enhancing Documentation of Military Conduct

Robust documentation is vital for transparency, accountability, and effective planning in military operations. Accurate and real-time recording of civilian harm can inform operational strategies and contribute to post-conflict justice. Institution-

alizing collaboration between humanitarian organizations, military actors, and international observers is essential to ensure comprehensive monitoring and reporting. The literature on the protection of civilians (PoC) under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) reveals a dynamic yet fragmented landscape. While legal norms and institutional doctrines have evolved significantly, implementation gaps persist due to political, logistical, and doctrinal challenges. By critically engaging with both theoretical and practical dimensions of PoC, this research aims to identify strategic, policy-relevant recommendations to enhance protection outcomes in contemporary armed conflicts.

The Legal and Operational Foundations of Civilian Protection. Extensive scholarly work has examined the legal and operational dimensions of civilian protection under IHL. Scholars such as [Sandoz et al. \(1987\)](#) and [Roberts & Guelff \(2000\)](#) emphasize the normative strength of the Geneva Conventions. However, critics highlight the inadequacies in enforcement and accountability mechanisms. [Bellamy and Williams \(2010\)](#) argue that peacekeeping mandates often lack the clarity and resources required for effective implementation. Institutions like the ICRC and NGOs such as Human Rights Watch have documented persistent civilian casualties, even in missions with explicit PoC directives.

8.4. Theoretical and Normative Frameworks

The Theoretical contributions from feminist and post-colonial scholars further explore how gender, race, and geopolitical interests influence the failures of PoC implementation. This body of literature underscores that while the legal foundation of PoC is robust, its translation into practice remains uneven and deeply political. Theoretical Foundations and Normative Frameworks norms of civilian protection are codified in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, which articulate the principles of distinction, proportionality, and necessity ([ICRC, 1949](#)). The [ICRC \(2012, 2015\)](#) remains a leading authority advocating for the protection of civilians through legal dissemination, monitoring, and operational engagement. The principle of civilian immunity is further supported by [UN Security Council, Security Council Resolution 1674 \(2006\)](#); [UN Security Council, Security Council Resolution 1894 \(2009\)](#); [UN Security Council, Security Council Resolution 2010 \(2011\)](#), all of which emphasize state responsibility and the importance of effective peacekeeping mandates.

8.5. Challenges in Implementation

The Doctrinal and Operational Approaches. International actors have adopted diverse strategies to operationalize PoC in conflict zones. The UN's Capstone Doctrine and related guidance documents provide a conceptual framework for peacekeeping operations, emphasizing a tiered approach that includes physical protection, political engagement, and legal accountability ([UN DPKO/DFS, 2010a, 2010b, 2012](#)). NATO's Allied Joint Doctrine (AJP-3.4(A)) similarly outlines civilian protection in non-Article 5 crisis response operations ([NATO, 2010](#)). Com-

parative analyses by [Beadle \(2010\)](#) and [Holt & Berkman \(2006\)](#) highlight doctrinal gaps and inconsistencies between UN and NATO mandates, particularly concerning force posture, rules of engagement, and mandate clarity.

Institutional and Inter-Agency Coordination. Effective civilian protection often hinges on robust civil-military coordination. Studies by [Giffen \(2010, 2011\)](#), [Metcalf \(2012\)](#), and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response ([SCHR, 2010](#)) highlight the challenges of cooperation between military forces and humanitarian actors. Coordination failures frequently result from divergent mandates, differing perceptions of neutrality, and mismatched operational tempos. Initiatives such as the UK's Stabilisation Unit and U.S. Joint Publications (FM 3-07; JP 3-07.3) advocate for integrated approaches that combine stabilization, development, and humanitarian efforts ([UK MOD, 2011](#); [US Army, 2010](#)).

Despite normative advances, implementation remains inconsistent. Reports from the Challenges Forum, the Stimson Center, and Citizens for Global Solutions point to operational constraints such as unclear mandates, limited resources, and political inertia ([Durch & Giffen, 2010](#); [Holt et al., 2009](#)). The UN Secretary-General's reports ([Annan, 1999, 2005](#); [Ban, 2011](#)) frequently note the discrepancy between rhetorical commitments and actual protection on the ground. Scholars such as [Salvesen \(2013\)](#) and [Lie & de Carvalho \(2009\)](#) also criticize institutional inertia, insufficient political will, and reluctance to employ protective force.

8.6. Case Studies: Somalia, Darfur, and Beyond

Case Studies: Somalia, Darfur, and Beyond. Empirical studies of PoC in Somalia (AMISOM) and Darfur (UNAMID) illustrate the complexities of protection in hostile environments. [Lotze & Kasumba \(2012\)](#) and reports from the [African Union Commission \(2010, 2014\)](#) highlight AMISOM's doctrinal evolution and limited success in repelling insurgents. However, civilian casualties resulting from indiscriminate tactics remain a concern. Field observations and interviews conducted by [Almajali \(2014\)](#) and [OCHA \(2014\)](#) further document gaps in protection and the adverse humanitarian impacts in these regions.

8.7. Non-State Actors and Evolving Security Landscapes

[The Geneva Academy \(2014\)](#) and [Blatter \(2011\)](#) examine the role of non-state armed groups in engaging or resisting PoC norms. While some actors adopt PoC principles to gain legitimacy, many violate these norms, complicating international response strategies. Engaging non-state actors through dialogue, dissemination of IHL, and humanitarian diplomacy remains a controversial but necessary frontier in advancing civilian protection.

8.8. Emerging Paradigms and Future Directions

Recent literature emphasizes evolving paradigms such as Mass Atrocity Response Operations (MARO), the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and protection through presence ([Sewall et al., 2010](#); [Hunt, 2008](#)). However, these models are often criti-

cized for over-reliance on military interventions and insufficient emphasis on prevention. Scholars increasingly advocate for community-based protection and localized early warning systems as more sustainable and context-sensitive approaches to PoC. Critical Analysis of Protection under the Fourth Geneva Convention Article 4 of the Fourth Geneva Convention ensures civilian protection during occupation and conflict. However, distinguishing civilians from combatants remains difficult in asymmetric and irregular warfare. Despite increased involvement by NGOs and the UN cluster system, missions in Rwanda and Darfur have struggled with legitimacy and effectiveness. A consistent shortcoming is the lack of adequate training and operational capacity among peacekeepers, which undermines civilian confidence in PoC efforts.

9. Discussion and Findings

The protection of civilians remains one of the most pressing challenges in contemporary armed conflict. Despite the existence of comprehensive legal frameworks under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), a significant implementation gap persists, driven by political constraints, operational shortcomings, and the evolving nature of warfare. This research highlights the urgent need for a coordinated, multi-actor approach that incorporates targeted training, policy reforms, and robust documentation strategies. Enhancing the effectiveness of PoC requires not only strict compliance with IHL but also the development of adaptive strategies tailored to the complex realities on the ground, particularly in conflict-affected regions such as Africa. Only through such integrated efforts can the normative promise of civilian protection be transformed into tangible security for those most at risk. The findings highlight a troubling disconnect between the legal obligations established under IHL and the actual protection civilians receive in armed conflicts. This disjuncture is exacerbated by ambiguous mandates, inadequate resources, and inconsistent political will. Peacekeeping forces often lack the capacity and clarity to act decisively in the face of threats, while NGOs and humanitarian actors face limited access and security risks. Furthermore, documentation gaps and jurisdictional limitations severely hinder efforts to hold perpetrators accountable. Thus, while IHL provides a robust normative architecture, its practical application requires systemic reforms across legal, operational, and political domains.

10. Conclusion

This paper concludes that strengthening civilian protection under IHL demands a more integrated, context-sensitive approach. Legal reforms should aim to clarify PoC mandates and close enforcement gaps. Operational frameworks must prioritize coordination between international actors, peacekeepers, and humanitarian organizations. Moreover, incorporating primary data from field actors and affected populations can enhance the responsiveness and legitimacy of PoC initiatives. Only through cohesive, well-resourced, and transparent strategies can the

promise of civilian protection in international law be transformed into meaningful security on the ground.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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