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RED LINES

THE LAWS OF WAR

A 52-minute documentary directed by François-Xavier Trégan

A production by ARTE GEIE/MEMENTO



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PITCH

Next summer, the international community will celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. These texts remain the cornerstone of international law for humanitarian treatment in war. But wars today are nothing like the wars of the past and the conflicts of tomorrow will be nothing like the conflicts we see today. So do these rules of war still apply? What challenges do the Geneva Conventions face today? Will they be able to pre-empt increasingly technological armed confrontations? "Red Lines" takes us to the heart of these laws.

Increasing numbers of armed groups, cross-border conflicts, killer robots, the influence of religion on the rules of engagement... Although the number of soldiers killed in combat has fallen dramatically since the end of the Second World War, civilians are now the primary victims of conflicts which ride roughshod over the rules and regulations.



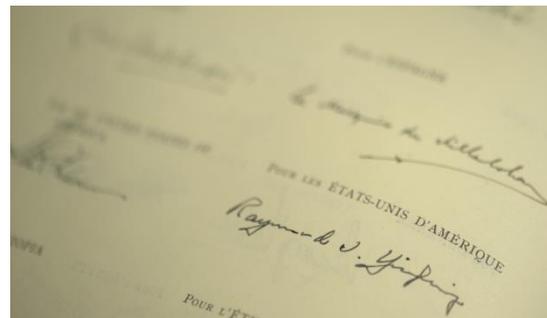
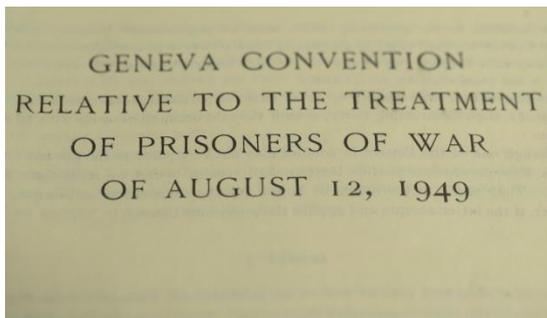
THE ILLUSION OF LAW OR MERCILESS WAR

The world has rarely been blighted by as many conflicts and wars as there are today. Civil wars, interstate disputes, tribal or ethnic rivalries, guerrilla wars, insurrections... Whatever their motivations and the stakes, belligerents rarely pay much attention to the rules or laws intended to govern conflicts. And, despite significant and real progress in recent years, international law for humanitarian treatment in war is regularly flouted. The prevalence of mass murder, rape, torture, use of illegal weapons, targeting of civilian populations, kidnapping and forced imprisonments actually reveal an "illusion": the more progress is made with the international laws of war, the more states and armed groups cross those red lines, forcing those who make the laws to always expect the worst.

MODERN WARS and A SINGLE LAW

In 2019, the international community will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Geneva Conventions. These treaties and protocols remain the cornerstone of a code of conduct for armed conflicts, especially the treatment of prisoners, civilians and the wounded. The Geneva Conventions aimed to protect both combatants and civilians and told us that legitimate war must be fought with respect for the human values of dignity and justice. These conventions were ratified worldwide, giving them universal jurisdiction, which means that, in theory, every country in the world must respect them.

But, as this anniversary is commemorated, there will no doubt be somewhere in Eastern Europe, in the Middle East, in South Asia or in Africa, where civilians and the wounded and prisoners of war will be subjected to the worst acts of violence. There will no doubt be states where armed groups will resort to rape, torture, extra-judicial killings, pillage or illegal weapons to impose their authority. And the international community will no doubt strongly denounce the violation of these red lines, and, for the most part, these war crimes will also no doubt go unpunished for a long time.



Despite some real advances over the last decades, the law of war, conceived and constructed out of the ruins of the Second World War, seem more than ever like an illusion. With the emergence of global terrorism in the 1990s, the law has even gone backwards. In the name of national security, countries find ways to circumvent the law (drone strikes, black site detentions, etc.) and do not hesitate to conduct military actions that have devastating effects on civilian populations (the recent battles in Raqqa and Mosul being two tragic examples). Armed groups, not recognised by the international community, are carrying out their actions and offensives guided by an ideology of violence and barbarism (guerrillas, Islamic State, etc.).

Is the law of war still relevant? Why do combatants cross the red line? Why are the authorities and institutions responsible for ensuring its proper implementation unable to detect and condemn these violations? What are the challenges facing the law today, now that we are seeing "new fighters" emerging and now that cyber-warfare has become a reality and that civilians account for 90% of war victims?

DIRECTOR'S NOTE OF INTENTION

"RED LINES" goes to the heart of contemporary conflicts to show the first-hand reality of this law of war today and to explore the challenges it faces. Immersed in southern of Turkey, in Iraq and in the Ukraine, the film compares the raw text with the reality on the ground. At every stage of this geographical and thematic journey, the witness account of a combatant either precedes or follows an account from a relative of a war victim. As a crude reminder of the reality of this law, and without the need for additional commentary, the words of the war crime victims and their torturers intertwine. Narration from the victims over still and long shots which show the violence of the conflicts, then portraits taken in close-up of combatants as they give their accounts. These calm sequences, with a steady rhythm of images and words gradually revealing their subjects, contrast starkly with the rhythm and movement of the action.

Missions to the front line, combatant training camps, the rhythm of the exchanges, the reactions, the words of the instructor and the reply of the "student".



"RED LINES" will constantly alternate the two rhythms to question the real significance of the Geneva Conventions across four areas:

- The Syrian conflict or the law of war apprenticeship.
- The war against Islamic State, or the fight against a new enemy.
- The war between Russia and the Ukraine, from traditional conflict to hybrid war.
- Killer robots, algorithms... towards the dehumanisation of combat.

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