

M I S C E L L A N E O U S

HOSPITAL ZONES AND LOCALITIES IN THE PRESENT CONCEPT OF WAR

Dr. E. Evrard, Général Major Médecin e.r. of Belgium, has published in *International Review of the Army, Navy and Air Force Medical Services* (No. 7-8; Liège, 1973) an article on problems concerning "sanitary" ¹ zones and localities in the present concept of war. We quote below the summary accompanying the article.

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The Geneva Conventions No. 1 and No. 4 of 1949 provide for the creation of sanitary zones and localities.

A draft agreement annexed to the Conventions sets forth certain restrictions relating to the size, density of population, distance from military targets, choice of the areas, means of communication and defence of these zones and localities.

Two new factors in fact govern the present situation:

(a) there is not one single point of national soil—or even of a whole continent—that is still safe from massive aerial bombardments by manned aircraft or missiles. The notion of a "front" has now very slight value and, consequently, the notion of distances no longer has the same content;

(b) the destructive power of nuclear weapons implies massive losses and harmful long range action due to radioactive fall out.

¹ This is, of course, a *faux ami*. The word "sanitaire" used in the French version of the Geneva Conventions is properly interpreted as "hospital".

Concerning the provisions of the Geneva Convention No. 1, the following conclusions are to be drawn from these considerations:

1. The status of sanitary localities can only apply to closed circuit civil wars or conventional type wars between two individual countries. It would be difficult to apply during wars of national liberation or revolutionary wars;

2. In case of general war between two powerful blocs, whole regions would have to be neutralised whether or not nuclear weapons are used.

However, when it is realised the number of concurrent conditions that would in practice have to obtain, considerable difficulties at once become apparent with regard to:

- (I) the choice of sites,
- (II) the organisation and working of sanitary areas and
- (III) means of transport required to reach these self same areas. Financial and economic difficulties would not be slight in addition to those enumerated.

In the control of the conditions relating to the creation and to the activities of sanitary zones, many difficulties subsist in the frame of the International Law. Solutions proposed by the Conference of Government Experts on the reaffirmation and development of international humanitarian Law applicable in armed conflicts (Geneva - 1971-1972) appear to be still unsatisfactory and unrealistic, in case of disagreement between Parties.

The creation and working of sanitary areas and security zones provided for by Convention No. 4 gives rise to problems even more difficult to solve. The creation of mixed zones is not a valid solution.