

# The *International Review of the Red Cross* and the protection of civilians, c. 1919–1939

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## Abstract

*This article will use past issues of the International Review of the Red Cross to examine how the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) has engaged with the issue of civilian protection over the course of its history. Although founded to organize humanitarian relief and legal protection for wounded and sick combatants, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the wider Movement have increasingly incorporated civilian war victims into their remit since their establishment. Yet, as this article will highlight, this process has not been straightforward. Focussing on the critical period between the two World Wars, the article will use the Review to illustrate why the Red Cross began engaging with the “civilianization” of conflicts in response to the threat of new technologies like gas and aerial bombardment. Using articles from the Review to highlight the key challenges faced by the Movement in protecting civilians over this period, it will also consider the gaps in the Red Cross’s initial conceptions of who “the civilian” was, why belligerents attacked them, and what was the best means of protecting them.*

**Keywords:** aerial bombardment, chemical warfare, civilians, civilianization, First World War, Second World War, international humanitarian law, protection.

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“Why protect civilians?”, Hugo Slim asks in a simple yet provocative question.<sup>1</sup> The very concept of “the civilian” represents one of the implicit social contracts in wartime ethics: that armies should not inflict violence upon individuals who are unarmed and pose no threat to them. As Geoffrey Best surmises, it is not only immoral but counterproductive for belligerents to kill or injure populations who are “theoretically of no consequence in a military contest”.<sup>2</sup> Best’s use of the word “theoretically” is significant, however. In the complex realities of warfare, as numerous scholars have argued, simplistic distinctions between soldiers and “innocent” civilians are difficult to maintain. Whether knowingly or unwittingly, civilians can contribute to conflicts economically (by providing materials or money to belligerents), politically (by engaging in political decisions which may have a military impact) or militarily (by sheltering soldiers or guerrilla forces). Belligerents may thus inflict violence upon civilians because of the ways in which these “innocent” populations can “support” conflicts. Violence may also achieve other purposes, like inflicting chaos on an enemy’s society, which impacts their ability to wage war; or belligerents may regard violence as justified retribution for their enemies’ past “crimes”.<sup>3</sup> While violence against civilians predates the twentieth century, Andrew Barros and Martin Thomas argue that the civil–military divide has become more “dynamic and unpredictable” in the last century. The changing nature of warfare and patterns of mobilization have complicated the lines between battlefield and home front, international and civil wars, and combatants and non-combatants.<sup>4</sup>

If these factors explain why civilians may need protection, a key follow-up question to Slim’s is: “How do we protect civilians?” What does protection actually cover? According to humanitarian scholars and practitioners like Jean-Luc Blondel and Frédéric Mégret, modern international humanitarian law (IHL), as well as other frameworks like human rights and refugee law, guarantees legal protection to civilians in war zones. IHL sets out the obligations due to “protected persons”, including civilians, and the respective responsibilities of belligerents, States, and

1 Hugo Slim, “Why Protect Civilians? Innocence, Immunity and Enmity in War”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 3, 2003.

2 Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare: The Modern History of the International Law of Armed Conflicts*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1980, p. 271.

3 On the dynamics of and justifications for violence against civilians, see H. Slim, above note 1; Andreas Wenger and Simon J. A. Mason, “The Civilianization of Armed Conflict: Trends and Implications”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 90, No. 872, 2008. For violence in modern civil wars in particular, see Stathis Kalyvas, “The Ontology of ‘Political Violence’: Action and Identity in Civil Wars”, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2003; Christopher Cramer, *Civil War Is Not a Stupid Thing: Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries*, Hurst, London, 2006.

4 Andrew Barros and Martin Thomas, “Introduction: The Civilianization of War and the Changing Civil–Military Divide, 1914–2014”, in Andrew Barros and Martin Thomas (eds), *The Civilianization of War: The Changing Civil–Military Divide, 1914–2014*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018, p. 2.

intermediaries like the Red Cross to honour these obligations: fundamentally, Blondel argues, “it is the law that protects”.<sup>5</sup> Yet, in the history of warfare, civilian populations are a relatively recent addition to IHL: the Fourth Geneva Convention (GC IV), the first comprehensive international legal framework to cover civilian protection, was only instituted in 1949. Moreover, as Barros and Thomas argue, while these legal frameworks have certainly influenced the history of warfare since the start of the twentieth century, the emergence of these legal codes have paralleled, rather than necessarily prevented, the “civilianization” of war.<sup>6</sup>

The 150th anniversary of the *International Review of the Red Cross* (and its predecessor the *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*)<sup>7</sup> provides an important moment to reflect on the history of civilian protection in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement). The journal itself provides a window onto the Movement’s complex history of protecting civilians. By considering when, how and why the *Review* framed civilian protection as a humanitarian problem, one can see the particular priorities and norms that motivated organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) at particular historical junctures. To do this, this article will focus on the *Review* (and the *Bulletin*) in the early twentieth century. This focus represents a methodological decision. Given the breadth of the ICRC’s engagement with civilian protection since the early twentieth century, this article chooses to provide a more detailed study of the period when the Movement first began to engage with the protection of civilian populations.

The first section of the article, exploring the years between the *Bulletin*’s founding in 1869 and the First World War, will illustrate how civilian protection was a low priority for the Red Cross prior to 1914, and how the Great War changed this situation. The second section will provide a closer examination of the *Review* in the interwar period. The journal demonstrates how the Movement framed civilian protection in regard to the rise of new technologies like chemical warfare and aerial bombardment, and also how the Movement sought to build a transnational network of scientific and technical expertise aimed at limiting these weapons’ harmful effects upon civilians. The third section will assess what selected articles from the *Review* reveal about the early history of the Red Cross’s work on civilian protection, including the ambiguities in, and limits of, the way the Movement defined the very ideas of “civilian” and “protection”. The final section will provide an overview of the subsequent history of civilian protection since 1945, and will analyze what those early articles from the *Review* tell us about civilian protection today. In particular, it will stress that a key “lesson”

5 Jean-Luc Blondel, “Assistance to Protected Persons”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 27, No. 260, 1987, p. 452; Frédéric Mégret, “The ‘Protection of Civilians’: Peacekeeping’s New Raison d’Être?”, in A. Barros and M. Thomas (eds), above note 4.

6 A. Barros and M. Thomas, above note 4, pp. 8–9.

7 Henceforth, this article will refer to the *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge* (published between 1869 and 1918) as the *Bulletin*. It will refer to the *International Review of the Red Cross* (or the *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, published from 1919 to the present) as the *Review*. All quotations from French-language articles have been translated by the author.

from the interwar period is the importance of being attentive to the needs of *all* civilians, rather than a singular concept of “the civilian”. The history of the Red Cross’s civilian protection efforts provides no straightforward “models” for current practice, but it does illustrate the importance of being attentive to local contexts and different voices, including civilians’ own, as a way for practitioners to construct appropriate protection mechanisms.

## The Bulletin and civilian protection, c. 1869–1921

As indicated in the introduction to this article, while civilians have invariably been victims of conflict throughout history, the “civilianization” of warfare increased rapidly over the course of the ICRC’s history. From the first publication of the *Bulletin* in 1869 through to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, numerous conflicts provided an early warning for the kinds of trends that later emerged in the twentieth century. In this period, colonial conflicts in Cuba, South Africa and the Philippines, for instance, demonstrated how civil–military distinctions can break down during asymmetric wars.

In these conflicts, civilians constituted a key focus of both rebels’ and imperial armies’ strategies. For insurgents, civilians (either willingly or through coercion) provided key economic support, such as food and shelter to highly mobile guerrilla troops, as well as political support; aware of this, imperial armies adopted counter-insurgency strategies which employed ostensibly liberal “hearts and minds” policies alongside highly repressive tactics like the destruction of civilian property, the displacement of these populations into camps, and the use of summary violence against suspected rebel supporters.<sup>8</sup> If these colonial wars demonstrated how belligerents’ strategies and civilians’ own actions eroded civil–military distinctions, a more troubling trend from Germany’s “war of annihilation” against the Herero people of Southwest Africa was how, in certain conflicts, genocidal conceptions of race led belligerents to seek the complete extermination of their enemies, both combatants and non-combatants.<sup>9</sup>

While these conflicts foreshadowed issues which would plague efforts at civilian protection during the twentieth century, they also indicated the ICRC’s lack of attention to civilian war victims during its first fifty years. This is exemplified by the silence in the *Bulletin* regarding the “civilianization” of these conflicts, even if the journal did note issues surrounding persons *hors de combat*,

8 For an overview of these colonial conflicts, see Iain R. Smith and Andreas Stucki, “The Colonial Development of Concentration Camps 1868–1902”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2011. For an overview of the US strategies in the Philippines, see Brian McAllister Linn, *The US Army and Counter-Insurgency in the Philippine War 1899–1902*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 1989. For a recent and detailed history of British concentration camps and the humanitarian and coercive ideas that underpinned them, see Aidan Forth, *Barbed-Wire Imperialism: Britain’s Empire of Camps, 1876–1903*, University of California Press, Oakland, CA, 2017.

9 Isabel Hull, “The Military Campaign in German Southwest Africa, 1904–1907”, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, No. 37, 2005.

like medical care for wounded soldiers.<sup>10</sup> A handful of articles on civil wars examined the potential difficulties of defining rebels who were not members of regular military forces, and the journal did call attention to the “nameless massacre” of Armenians in 1909; it also appealed to National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) to send material aid to refugees in Macedonia in 1904.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, the ICRC remained cautious about intervening on behalf of civilians in colonial conflicts. For instance, in 1899 the Spanish Red Cross asked the ICRC to intercede on behalf of Spanish citizens who were being held prisoner in the Philippines since the start of the anti-colonial revolution in the archipelago. In the *Bulletin*, the ICRC stated that the situation of these prisoners was “worthy of interest” but outside the scope of its work; in fact, the reply went on, it would “jeopardise the existence of this institution [the ICRC] to make it an instrument for the solution of all the humanitarian problems that war can raise”.<sup>12</sup> According to Matthias Schulz, before 1914 the ICRC was generally anxious about potentially diluting its humanitarian mission and principles by extending its remit beyond its core concern: establishing legal protection for wounded and sick soldiers.<sup>13</sup> However, caution about its mandate may not necessarily have been the sole factor inhibiting the ICRC’s engagement with civilian protection. In particular, the way it overlooked civilian suffering in colonial warfare may have reflected its broader anxiety about intervening in these particular conflicts. According to Daniel Palmieri, the ICRC was primarily concerned with humanizing war between “civilized nations” prior to 1914. As Palmieri elaborates, the ICRC’s early conceptions of warfare were shaped by fairly simplistic binary distinctions of “war/peace”, “international/national”, “civilization/barbarity” and “soldier/civilian” – theoretical distinctions which did not necessarily equate to the realities of warfare as experienced by its participants.<sup>14</sup> The attitude that colonial warfare constituted an “exception” to the normative rules of “civilized” warfare was widespread beyond the ICRC, and may explain why the organization was so concerned about regulating wars between European powers but not wars between European imperialists and “barbarous” populations.

10 See, for instance, the report by Frederic Ferrière on the South African War: Frederic Ferrière, “Pertes de l’armée anglaise dans le sud de l’Afrique et ressources sanitaires”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 32, No. 126, 1901.

11 See for instance, “La charité dans les guerres civiles”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1870. For Armenia, see “Le Comité de Constantinople et les massacres en Arméniens”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 40, No. 159, 1909. For the appeals for Macedonia, see “Appel en faveur des victimes de l’insurrection macédonienne”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 35, No. 137, 1904.

12 “Les Prisonniers de Guerre aux Philippines”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 30, No. 118, 1899, p. 90.

13 Matthias Schulz, “Dilemmas of ‘Geneva’ Humanitarian Internationalism: The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Red Cross Movement, 1863–1918”, in Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016.

14 Daniel Palmieri, “How Warfare Has Evolved – a Humanitarian Organization’s Perception: The Case of the ICRC, 1863–1960”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 97, No. 900, 2015.

Whatever the precise reasons for the ICRC's lack of engagement with civilian protection before 1914, Palmieri argues that the First World War shattered many of the organization's hitherto simplistic attitudes about warfare.<sup>15</sup> While the ICRC had made significant contributions to IHL in the decades prior to the war, civilian populations remained poorly defined in the Geneva and Hague Conventions, and their legal protection was confined to the more nebulous area of "customary law".<sup>16</sup> Most European contemporaries regarded the separation of civilians from conflict as a tacit agreement of warfare between "civilized" nations. The nature of industrial warfare soon challenged this assumption. In part, the patterns of mobilization for war in 1914 problematized separations between battlefield and home front, as entire societies willingly rallied behind their national war efforts.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the dynamics of violence that the Great War generated saw civilians directly targeted by belligerents on both sides.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of "home fronts" to battlefield operations, and the development of increasingly aggressive wartime cultures, encouraged the breakdown of civil–military distinctions: the fact of whether an individual was a soldier or a civilian mattered less than their nationality or ethnicity in defining who was an "enemy", an "ally" or a "neutral".<sup>19</sup> Germany's violent suppression of occupied territories and its Zeppelin bombardment of British cities, Britain's own attempts to starve the German population through its naval blockade, and (most extreme of all) the Ottoman Empire's genocide of its Armenian population<sup>20</sup> – all these examples demonstrated to contemporaries that the supposedly self-evident moral distinction between "innocent" civilians and soldiers, so critical to pre-war notions of "civilized warfare", was actually inherently unstable.<sup>21</sup>

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 992–993.

16 A. Barros and M. Thomas, above note 4, pp. 8–9; Isabel Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2014, pp. 88–94.

17 John Horne (ed.), *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

18 Annette Becker, "The Great War: World War, Total War", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 97, No. 900, 2015; Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007.

19 For one case study of this dynamic of the war, see Nicoletta Gullace's study of wartime communities in Britain, which showed how nationality and ethnicity supplanted pre-war liberal attitudes about immigration: Nicoletta Gullace, "Friends, Aliens, and Enemies: Fictive Communities and the Lusitania Riots of 1915", *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2005.

20 Note that the use of the term "genocide" reflects the majority of current historical interpretations of the Ottoman State's killing of Armenians, although contemporary publications tended to refer to the "massacre of" or "atrocities against" Armenians. The term "genocide" was itself coined in Raphael Lemkin's 1944 study *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. See Keith Watenpaugh, *Bread From Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism*, University of California Press, Oakland, CA, 2015, pp. 76–86.

21 For an examination of the respective legality of German and British actions against civilians according to contemporary international law, see I. Hull, above note 16, pp. 317–332. On the Armenian genocide, see Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.

The *Bulletin* itself provides a window onto how belligerents and the ICRC understood and responded to this upsurge in violence against civilian populations. Throughout the First World War, the *Bulletin* gave nations the opportunity to publish their own reports and perspectives on the conflict. In practice, this meant the journal often functioned as a space in which belligerents attempted to convince neutral international opinion about the moral legitimacy of their own wartime conduct, and to accuse their enemies of violating IHL or customary law (often referred to as the “laws of civilized nations”). For example, it allowed Germany to respond to the Entente’s accusations about its army’s alleged atrocities against civilians in the occupied territories of Belgium and northern France, such as in 1916, when the German Foreign Office used the *Bulletin* to publish a report defending its military’s action in Belgium. This report argued that any civilians who took up arms against the invading German army could not be regarded as combatants, since they were not part of a recognized military, and thus were not entitled to the obligations guaranteed to military personnel.<sup>22</sup> The majority of recent historical interpretations have argued that the mass reprisals initiated by the German army against civilians in occupied territories were disproportionate to the actual limited guerrilla resistance against that army. Historical explanations of the German army’s reprisals have debated whether violence developed “on the ground”, from German troops’ exaggerated perceptions of the prevalence of *francs-tireurs*, or through the culture of German militarism.<sup>23</sup> While the *Bulletin* does not provide a definitive answer to this question, it does indicate how belligerents exploited the lack of legal clarity about the identity of civilians in war zones to justify attacks against populations, even unarmed ones, whom they interpreted as a “threat”.

The *Bulletin* also indicated how the ICRC was recognizing that soldiers were not the only victims of industrial warfare. While the organization did not take action on behalf of all civilian war victims, the experiences of 1914–18 showed that it could respond to these “new” war victims without damaging its core concern for persons *hors de combat*. Specifically, the ICRC’s work on wartime detention, through its Prisoners of War Agency, demonstrated how the organization could tackle a problem which affected both combatant and non-combatant populations. The war saw civilian detention increase on an unprecedented scale, as belligerents interned enemy nationals within their own borders, or took forced labourers or hostages from occupied territories. Besides its work for military prisoners of war (PoWs), the Prisoners of War Agency made itself responsible for protecting and collecting information about the various categories of civilian prisoners, from internees housed in larger prison camps to the deportees and hostages that belligerents had seized from occupied

22 “La conduite de la guerre en Belgique”, *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 47, No. 186, 1916.

23 John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2001; I. Hull, above note 16, pp. 51–57.



territories.<sup>24</sup> The *Bulletin* was a key instrument in the Agency's work. In January 1915, the journal published Gustave Ador's request that all belligerents provide equal treatment to both military and civilian prisoners.<sup>25</sup> Subsequent volumes of the *Bulletin* published summaries of ICRC delegates' reports to civilian internment camps.<sup>26</sup> By sharing information on conditions in respective nations, and hopefully showing belligerents that their enemies were providing "humane" care for civilian detainees, the ICRC hoped to curb the cycles of reprisals and counter-reprisals which developed in response to stories of alleged ill-treatment of prisoners.<sup>27</sup> Besides monitoring camps and making recommendations for improvements to interning authorities, the ICRC also made more forceful declarations against the practice of civilian internment. In 1917, Dr Frederic Ferrière, the head of the ICRC's civil internee department, used the *Bulletin* to denounce the continued practice of civilian internment by all sides. He urged nations to repatriate all civil prisoners, who were being "held in violation of the principle accepted at all times under the law of nations", or at least provide them with the same treatment afforded to military PoWs.<sup>28</sup> While Ferrière's pleas did not result in belligerents abolishing internment, they demonstrated how authors in the *Bulletin* were engaging with the key problems facing civilian war victims and were attempting to alter belligerents' behaviour and actions towards these war victims.

In the years immediately after the war, the ICRC continued to organize aid for civilian war victims. As Bruno Cabanes has noted, the transition from war to peace posed additional challenges to nations "already deeply shaken by the war", such as population displacement, famine, disease and paramilitary violence.<sup>29</sup> In a circular addressed to National Societies just days after the war ended, the ICRC stated the necessity of the Red Cross doing "something on behalf of the unfortunate victims" of these various disasters.<sup>30</sup> Alongside new transnational humanitarian bodies like the International Save the Children Union (whom the

24 For more on the various categories of civilian prisoners during the war, and the ICRC's response, see Matthew Stibbe, "The Internment of Civilians by Belligerent States during the First World War and the Response of the International Committee of the Red Cross", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2006.

25 Gustave Ador, "Egalité de traitement pour les prisonniers de guerre militaires ou civils (Cent soixante-troisième circulaire aux Comités centraux)", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 46, No. 181, 1915.

26 See, for instance, "Les internés civils en Hongrie", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 46, No. 183, 1915; "Rapports de MM. Ed. Naville et J. Martin sur leur voyage en Angleterre; MM. Blanchod et Speiser, Vernet et de Muralt, Schazmann et Cramer sur leurs voyages au Nord de l'Afrique, Maroc, Tunisie, Algérie; de MM. Thormeyer et Ferrière sur leur voyage en Russie", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 47, No. 186, 1916.

27 The ICRC's reports, however, were mainly confined to the larger civilian internment camps; gaining access to smaller battalions of forced labourers proved harder to achieve, meaning that the abuses against these prisoners received less international attention.

28 "Les Civils Rapport présenté par M. le Dr Ferrière à la Conférence de Croix-Rouges neutres à Genève", *Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 48, No. 192, 1917, pp. 374–376.

29 Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 5.

30 Quoted in John Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1996, p. 604.



ICRC patronized) and the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS), the organization helped coordinate some of the largest international relief efforts for civilians in the early 1920s, including those for the 1921 Russian Famine and refugees displaced during the Greco-Turkish War.<sup>31</sup> As numerous historians have demonstrated, beneficence was not the only reason why the ICRC began providing post-war assistance to civilian populations. The emergence of new, rival organizations, the LRCS in particular, threatened to make the ICRC obsolete in what many contemporaries expected would be a new era of peaceful international relations.<sup>32</sup> The ICRC's interest in "new" war victims, according to this analysis, represented a campaign to make itself more visible and relevant in the post-war humanitarian system: its motive, Irène Herrmann argues, was "not only to relieve victims but also to nibble away at the prerogatives and popularity of the League [of Red Cross Societies]".<sup>33</sup>

Over its fifty-year lifespan, the *Bulletin* had been silent on civilian suffering in conflict. For at least three key reasons, the Great War and its aftermath had challenged this silence: it demonstrated that civilians required as much protection from the horrors of war as soldiers did; from an organizational perspective, it demonstrated that the ICRC could practically incorporate concern for civilians into its wider mission of "humanizing" war; and the competition of new rivals provided another incentive for demonstrating that the organization could adapt to the new realities of warfare. Exemplifying the Movement's new concern for civilian populations, the 10th International Conference of the Red Cross (the first since the war's end) agreed that one of the key ways to make future wars "less inhuman" was by protecting "the civilian population from the effects of armed struggle, in which it should not be implicated".<sup>34</sup> The Conference also called upon all governments to modify the current Hague Regulations in order to ban all use of poison gas; to limit the potential of aerial warfare in order to prevent aerial bombardment; and, in direct relation to this, to more strictly enforce Article 25 regarding the bombardment of "undefended territories".<sup>35</sup> As the next section will show, the Red Cross's connection of these issues (civilianization of

31 For the ICRC's leadership role in coordinating relief for Soviet Russia, see "La famine en Russie soviétique", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 3, No. 32, 1921; B. Cabanes, above note 29, pp. 191–194. For the organization's work for civilian refugees in Greece, see Davide Rodogno, "The American Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross' Humanitarian Politics and Policies in Asia Minor and Greece (1922–1923)", *First World War Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2014. The ICRC delegate in the Near East, Comte de Chabannes la Palice, also helped coordinate material relief for Armenian refugees: see "Les actions de secours en faveur des Arméniens!", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 2, No. 15, 1920.

32 M. Schulz, above note 13, pp. 60–61; J. Hutchinson, above note 30.

33 Irène Herrmann, "Décrypter la concurrence humanitaire: Le conflit entre Croix-Rouge(s) après 1918", *Relations Internationales*, No. 151, 2012, p. 22; see also Francesca Piana, "Photography, Cinema, and the Quest for Influence: The International Committee of the Red Cross in the Wake of the First World War", in Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno (eds), *Humanitarian Photography: A History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015.

34 "Résolutions et vœux de la Xme Conférence internationale de la Croix-Rouge", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 3, No. 28, 1921, p. 336.

35 *Ibid.*

war, chemical warfare, and aerial bombardment) influenced how the Movement approached civilian protection during the interwar period.

## The *Review* and civilian protection, 1919–39

In 1919, marking the dawn of the new post-war era, the ICRC published the first edition of its new journal, the *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge* (later to be also published in English as the *International Review of the Red Cross*). The *Review*'s editors argued that the new journal would strengthen "one of the only links [between nations] that the war has not broken".<sup>36</sup> Their emphasis on the *Review* as a way for preserving and developing transnational cooperation within the Movement was not empty rhetoric. The aftermath of the war was marked by the emergence, or re-emergence, of internationalist groups and movements: international cooperation, to these organizations, was fundamental for mitigating the nationalist rivalries that had contributed to the outbreak of war in 1914.<sup>37</sup> Between the two World Wars, articles in the *Review* showcased the Red Cross's attempts to use connections within the Movement and with a wider network of international technical, military, political and legal "experts" to solve what they saw as the key problems of civilian protection.<sup>38</sup> As will be shown, the journal itself played a role in linking this transnational network by communicating information across the Movement; equally though, these articles illustrate the frustrations and obstacles that the Red Cross faced in its mission.

The first half of the 1920s appeared to herald progress for contemporaries seeking to prevent and humanize warfare. Article 5 of the 1922 Washington Treaty relating to the Use of Submarines and Noxious Gases in Warfare (Washington Treaty), signed by the United States, Britain, France, Italy and Japan, affirmed that chemical warfare was contrary to international law and "the general opinion of the civilized world".<sup>39</sup> Although this aspect of the Washington Treaty was not ratified by the signatory powers, it was followed up by the more comprehensive Geneva Protocol on the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating,

36 Paul Des Gouttes, Etienne Clouzot and K. de Watteville, "Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge et Bulletin International des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1919, p. 2.

37 For recent works on interwar internationalism, see Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012; Patricia Clavin and Glenda Sluga (eds), *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016.

38 The use of quote marks around the term "expert" throughout this article reflects the fact that humanitarian organizations and individuals often used somewhat tenuous definitions of their "expertise" or experience to justify their control of humanitarian operations, thus maintaining this control in the face of potential opposition from other humanitarian organizations, governments or recipients.

39 See Article 5 and the full Washington Treaty at the ICRC Treaties, States Parties and Commentaries Database, available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yxmjcs2u> (all internet references were accessed in March 2019).

Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare (Geneva Protocol), signed in June 1925 by thirty nations.<sup>40</sup>

Articles in the *Review* in the early 1920s highlight the mixture of optimism and trepidation with which ICRC members viewed the developments in arms limitations. Reviewing the Washington Treaty and Geneva Protocol, Lucien Cramer and Horace Micheli praised the “important work” done by these treaties. However, drawing upon the assessments of the “experts” who contributed to drafting these treaties, their article also displayed the continued anxieties that these international agreements were overly reliant on the goodwill of the signatories to enforce these standards.<sup>41</sup> Evidencing how the Great War had undermined faith in the practical viability of IHL, Cramer and Micheli argued that belligerents were likely to violate legal frameworks like the Hague Conventions in the context of large-scale and total war.<sup>42</sup> Referencing the work of Joaquin Enrique Zanetti, a member of the League of Nations’ mixed commission on chemical warfare, the article argued that it was relatively easy for nations with well-developed chemical industries and infrastructure to produce weapons “overnight”. Moreover, referring to the recent Geneva conference on the international arms trade, Cramer and Micheli reported the delegates’ opinion that it would be objectionable, if not impossible, for international authorities to police the private industries of individual nations.<sup>43</sup> Given that not all nations signed the Geneva Protocol, and the fact many nations reserved the right to use chemical weapons in retaliation for attacks upon themselves, the authors were pessimistic about the prospect of chemical weapons not featuring in future wars. Even ostensibly progressive nations, they argued, “[despite] having signed the most solemn commitments, would not hesitate to resort, in a moment of despair and as a last means of defence, to chemical weapons”, given the potency of these weapons and the relative simplicity of producing them.<sup>44</sup>

Cramer and Micheli’s article focussed on chemical warfare in general, rather than these weapons’ significance for civilians in particular. Nevertheless, their assessments represented the blueprint for subsequent articles on civilian protection in the *Review*, most of which shared their pessimistic assessment that chemical weapons would almost inevitably feature in future conflicts, despite treaties like the Geneva Protocol. The key difference between these future wars and the First World War, these articles argued, was that chemical warfare would

40 On the non-ratification of the Washington Treaty’s article on “noxious gasses”, see Dietrich Schindler and Jifi Toman, *The Laws of Armed Conflicts: A Collection of Conventions, Resolutions and Other Documents*, 3rd ed., Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht, 1988, p. 113.

41 For another author’s assessment of the successes and limits of the Geneva Protocol, see Andrew Webster, “The League of Nations, Disarmament and Internationalism”, in P. Clavin and G. Sluga (eds), above note 37, pp. 159–160.

42 Lucien Cramer and Horace Micheli, “La guerre chimique et ses conséquences”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 7, No. 81, 1925, pp. 678–679.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 687–689. For more on the precise reasons why the delegates at this conference dismissed the possibility of policing the industry and the trading of chemicals, see “Conference for the Control of the International Trade in Arms, Munitions and Implements of War; General Committee Chemical and Bacteriological Warfare”, League of Nations Archive (LNA), R188/8/32639/43927.

44 L. Cramer and H. Micheli, above note 42, p. 692.

not solely affect front-line combatants. According to Baron Drachenfels, a member of the ICRC's secretariat, the Great War had taught the world that "in modern wars ... the whole population of a country is more or less directly engaged", meaning that "unscrupulous belligerents will make no difference" between combatants and non-combatants.<sup>45</sup> As Drachenfels argued, there was no difficulty, "from the technical point of view", in using airplanes or long-range artillery to attack large cities with bombs loaded with gas.<sup>46</sup> Prefiguring the British politician Stanley Baldwin's assessment that "the bomber will always get through", Dr Sieur of the French Red Cross argued that improvements in aircraft technology had revolutionized warfare: now belligerents could pass over front lines to attack "the morale of the [enemy] population and the war industry of the country".<sup>47</sup> The fact that belligerents now had the means to attack civilians with chemical weapons was concerning for humanitarians like Cramer, who regarded it as highly probable that "the prohibitions contemplated by the diplomatic conferences could be violated".<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Professor L. Demolis, who played a major advisory role to the ICRC's work on civilian protection in the 1930s, argued that the Red Cross needed to proceed on the presumption that "legal prohibitions" like the Geneva Protocol, while "duly initiated and solemnly ratified, would be violated" in future international conflicts.<sup>49</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, one can see that these pessimistic assessments did not come to fruition: while there have been a number of violations of the Geneva Protocol since 1925, chemical weapons have remained an exceptional, rather than conventional, aspect of modern warfare. Yet these gloomy predictions indicate, firstly, the Red Cross's increasingly complex understanding of how nations mobilized for total war, and how these mobilizations placed civilian populations at greater risk in conflict. Secondly, these articles also demonstrated the pragmatism and pessimism which underlined these writers' internationalism. The experiences of the Great War had broken any naivety that "civilized" nations would inevitably respect IHL under the pressures of total warfare. The increasing destructive capacity of weapons was concerning in itself, but what individuals like Sieur were particularly worried about was what the development of techniques like aerial bombardment revealed about the changing "purpose" of warfare.<sup>50</sup> These weapons seemingly indicated the zero-sum nature of modern warfare, which could justify any methods and target any populations to achieve victory:

45 K. de Drachenfels, "La Croix-Rouge et la guerre chimique", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 9, No. 107, 1927, pp. 817–818.

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 818–819.

47 Dr Sieur, "Des instructions à donner aux populations civiles par conférences, affiches, tracts et films, sur les moyens de se protéger contre la guerre chimique", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 11, No. 125, 1929, p. 349.

48 Lucien Cramer, "La guerre chimique", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 10, No. 110, 1928, p. 93.

49 L. Demolis, "IIe réunion de la Commission internationale des experts (Rome 1929)", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 11, No. 121, 1929, p. 22.

50 Sieur, above note 47, p. 350.

they threatened civilians, but also the Red Cross's fundamental mission of humanizing warfare.

The key question which these articles posed, therefore, was that if current IHL did not guarantee civilians complete protection from chemical attacks, how could the Movement improve this protection? Cramer and Micheli proposed that the ICRC should build up a network of civilian and military experts in different nations to formulate practical suggestions for protecting "its [Red Cross] personnel, the belligerent armies and, especially, the civilian populations" in the event of a chemical attack.<sup>51</sup> The following month, the 12th International Conference of the Red Cross backed this proposal.<sup>52</sup> Over the next year, the ICRC invited National Societies to nominate "experts" to attend a conference in Brussels in April 1927.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the previous League of Nations commissions on chemical warfare, Drachenfels explained in the *Review*, this commission would "only deal with the point of view of the protection of the civilian population". Moreover, it would consult individuals with a wide range of "expertise", from "eminent chemists" and doctors to air force staff, town planners, engineers, police and fire brigades; these experts could provide advice on "technical" protection measures like communal shelters and gas mask designs, and how civil and medical authorities could respond to attacks.<sup>54</sup> The purpose of the commission, Cramer reminded readers in his report of the Brussels meeting, was that

since humanity has so far found only a very imperfect means of protecting itself against [chemical weapons] ... the Commission considers that there is only one practical way to counter this formidable danger: by pursuing without delay the means which will save the greatest number of human lives in case of a gas attack.<sup>55</sup>

This first meeting of experts offered only preliminary recommendations on each of these issues, but recommended two general steps: that all nations should immediately establish "mixed commissions" of civil and military personnel to formulate measures for protecting civilians in their own nations; and that these "mixed commissions" should share the technical information they generated on civilian protection from their own nations with the ICRC, who would collect and distribute as many relevant materials as possible through the *Review*.<sup>56</sup> Subsequent editions of the *Review* testify to the response of National Societies to this appeal, with numerous European National Societies establishing commissions

51 L. Cramer and H. Micheli, above note 42, p. 693.

52 "Résolutions et vœux votés par la XIIe Conférence internationale de la Croix-Rouge", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 7, No. 82, 1925, pp. 818–819.

53 See the circular letter distributed to National Societies, in "Letter, ICRC to M. Dronsart (Belgian Red Cross), 3 October 1927", ICRC Archive (ICRCA), CR159/120.

54 K. de Drachenfels, above note 45, pp. 812–813.

55 L. Cramer, above note 48, p. 109.

56 *Ibid.*, pp. 100–101.

of military, municipal, medical and charitable “experts”.<sup>57</sup> Besides reporting on the establishment of these commissions, the *Review* also disseminated the information that different National Societies sent in to the ICRC, such as gas mask designs,<sup>58</sup> the reports of exercises carried out by National Societies to rehearse civil and medical responses to a gas attack,<sup>59</sup> and bibliographies of other publications relevant to civil protection.<sup>60</sup>

The decision to focus the Red Cross’s efforts on saving civilians’ lives in the event of a chemical attack represented the aforementioned pessimism of humanitarians like Sieur, who argued that since “chemical warfare will undoubtedly play a major but decisive role in future conflicts ... it would be futile to be indignant at what cannot be prevented”.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, this strategy did not necessarily reflect complete cynicism with regard to the ability of international institutions and treaties to prevent “inhuman” warfare. While Cramer, Micheli and Drachenfels’ concerns about international law reflected a certain pragmatism, they also held faith that the Red Cross could contribute to the “moral struggle” to humanize warfare.<sup>62</sup> Like other contemporary internationalists, the ICRC expressed hopes that international cooperation could promote “moral disarmament”: the belief that societies not only had to stop building armaments, but should also “disarm” the cultures and mentalities which fostered support for war.<sup>63</sup> Ultimately, Cramer and Micheli argued, “the only way to kill chemical warfare is to kill the very idea of this war”.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the decision to focus efforts on “technical” protection for civilians did not mark a strict break from the ideals of “Genevan internationalism”. By using networks of “experts” to educate general publics, the Red Cross would demonstrate the dangers they faced in future conflicts, thus contributing to the process of “moral disarmament” and making the use of aero-chemical warfare less likely. Besides peace-building, this “expert” network also reinforced the ICRC’s central role within the Movement:

57 See for example, “Protection des populations civiles contre la guerre chimique”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 10, No. 114, 1928; L. Demolis, “A propos des Commissions mixtes nationales”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 10, No. 118, 1928; “Commissions mixtes nationales pour la protection des populations civiles contre la guerre chimique”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 12, No. 141, 1930; “Commissions mixtes nationales pour la protection des populations civiles contre la guerre aéro-chimique Commission internationale des experts”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 13, No. 156, 1931.

58 See, for instance, Rudolf Hanslian, “L’appareil de protection contre les gaz à l’usage de la population civile”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 11, No. 126, 1929; Anton Wagner, “La fabrication, le depot et l’entretien des masques contre les gaz et des vêtements de protection”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 11, No. 126, 1929; L. Demolis, “Le masque de protection contre l’oxyde de carbone”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 12, No. 144, 1930.

59 See for instance, “Défense aérienne et protection des civils”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 14, No. 160, 1932.

60 See, for instance, L. Demolis, “Une bibliographie de la guerre chimique: Publication de la Croix-Rouge espagnole”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 13, No. 152, 1931.

61 Sieur, above note 47, p. 349.

62 L. Cramer and H. Micheli, above note 42, p. 693.

63 On the importance of moral disarmament in interwar internationalism, see Andrew Barros, “Turn Everyone into a Civilian: René Cassin and the UNESCO Project, 1919–1945”, in A. Barros and M. Thomas (eds), above note 4.

64 L. Cramer and H. Micheli, above note 42, p. 689.

Cramer and Micheli's initial proposal emphasized that the ICRC's moral authority and its connections to all National Societies (unlike its rival, the LRCS) made it the natural choice to lead this project.

However, both in terms of educating the public and suggestions for "practical" protection measures, the committee of experts ran into key difficulties. Firstly, while general publics appeared to provide the path to "moral disarmament", humanitarians like Sieur remained cautious about how the Movement should "educate" the public about the threat of aero-chemical warfare. In an article outlining the different methods of publications, public talks and films that National Societies could use to disseminate information about aero-chemical warfare, Sieur emphasized that National Societies should be "cautious and moderate in exposing potential hazards to avoid panic and excessive fear".<sup>65</sup> Although Sieur's main concern may have been to maintain public order, other contemporaries feared that education about the dangers of aerial warfare, if done incorrectly, could encourage civilians to demand increased armaments to protect them from enemy forces, effectively working against the "moral disarmament" that the Movement sought.<sup>66</sup> One can also question whether the various rehearsals of aerial attacks and the emphasis on "preparing" civilians for attacks necessarily encouraged peace-building or kept societies on a permanent war footing. Greater attention to National Societies is required to uncover the exact reasons why particular nations carried out rehearsals of bombing raids – for instance, the *Review* shows how the future Axis powers of Germany and Japan carried out such trials as early as 1929, but Britain, France and Norway carried out their own tests in this period as well.<sup>67</sup>

A greater problem with the proposal to focus on "practical" or "technical" defence, however, was that it did not obviate the complexity of protecting civilians: quite the opposite, in fact. At the Brussels meeting, the German delegate de Moellendorff argued that the commission's task was too narrow in only considering the use of chemical weapons during an aerial attack: presciently, considering the development of strategic bombing during the 1930s and the Second World War, de Moellendorff argued that aerial bombardments were more likely to use conventional explosives that would pose as much or even greater harm to civilian life.<sup>68</sup> While the Brussels meeting ignored de Moellendorff's

65 Sieur, above note 47, p. 357.

66 See such concerns in the 1932 British draft aeronautical disarmament proposal, as outlined in Andrew Barros, "The Problems of Opening Pandora's Box: Strategic Bombing and the Civil–Military Divide, 1916–1939", in A. Barros and M. Thomas (eds), above note 4, pp. 169–170.

67 For Germany, see the exercises carried out before and after the birth of the Third Reich: "Défense aérienne", above note 59; L. Demolis, "Les manœuvres aériennes et la protection des populations civiles", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 17, No. 196, 1935. For Japan, see L. Demolis, "Exercices de protection de la population civile contre l'aérochimie effectués au Japon", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 10, No. 120, 1928. For Britain and France, see L. Demolis, "Les manœuvres aériennes et la défense des populations civiles", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 16, No. 188, 1934. For Norway, see "Exercices de protection aérienne en Norvège", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 14, No. 166, 1932.

68 Sidney H. Brown, "La protection de la population civile contre les dangers de la guerre aéro-chimique par des instruments diplomatiques", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 13, No. 153, 1931, p. 702.



remarks, by the second meeting of “experts” in Rome in 1929, the commission emphasized that the problem of chemical attacks on civilian populations could not be divorced from the wider problem of aerial bombardment.<sup>69</sup> This second meeting agreed that the use of conventional explosives greatly complicated their task. While agreeing that “it would be possible to shelter a large part of the civilian population” from a gas attack within specially constructed shelters, the commission agreed it was unlikely that such shelters would also be able to withstand high-explosive bombs; similarly, although individual gas masks may protect individuals from gas, they offered no protection from conventional explosives, and other “practical” measures like the large-scale evacuation of cities would also be almost impossible to organize effectively at short notice.<sup>70</sup> Given these limitations of any “technical” measures of protection, the commission recommended that the ICRC also consider “diplomatic instruments” for protection.

This advice forced the ICRC to reconsider its earlier scepticism of legal approaches to protection. The organization appointed a new commission of independent legal experts from European nations to meet in Geneva in December 1931, in anticipation of the 14th International Conference of the Red Cross and the World Disarmament Conference (WDC) the following year. This meeting re-emphasized many of the complexities and likely insufficiencies of protecting civilians through legal measures, and appeared to raise more questions and problems than solutions.<sup>71</sup> However, if the meeting did not necessarily achieve immediate results, it did represent a key moment in the ICRC’s history of civilian protection. The commission’s discussions and findings indicated the key legal areas which the ICRC and international community needed to redress if they were to improve international conventions on civilian protection. These included defining who civilians actually were, and their role in warring societies; determining how legal conventions could delineate “legitimate” targets, such as military bases and military industries, from “protected zones” or buildings, such as refugee camps or hospitals; and deciding what were the most effective ways to police possible conventions or to enforce sanctions in cases of violations.<sup>72</sup> The meeting did not find answers to these issues, but they did open questions to which the ICRC would return in later years, and which provided far greater nuance to how the organization framed civilian protection.

The Movement did not abandon the “technical” approach to protecting civilians. The 15th International Conference in 1935 emphasized that the ICRC should “continue the technical research undertaken up to now”, and that National Societies should continue sending information to the documentation

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 702–703.

70 “Commission internationale d’experts pour la protection des populations civiles contre la guerre chimique. IIe Session — Rome, 22–27 avril 1929. Résolutions”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 11, No. 125, 1929.

71 For the proceedings of this meeting, see “Commission internationale d’experts pour la protection juridique des populations civiles contre les dangers de la guerre aero-chimique. IIeme séance, mardi 1er decembre 1931”, ICRC, CR159j.

72 S. H. Brown, above note 68.

centre in Geneva. However, the Conference also emphasized the importance of securing “the means of legal protection of the civilian population”.<sup>73</sup> At the opening of the WDC in 1932, the ICRC submitted an appeal to delegates to improve legal protection for civilians, emphasizing how the Movement’s research had exposed the limits of technical protection: while acknowledging that legal measures banning aerial bombardment may have appeared “utopian” and would encounter resistance, the organization nevertheless urged the WDC to try and reach a settlement which would effectively ban aerial attacks on civilian populations.<sup>74</sup>

For reasons beyond the ICRC’s control, however, the WDC failed in most of its objectives, and no agreement on civilian protection was reached.<sup>75</sup> This further setback led writers in the *Review*, like the Swiss physician Heinrich Zangger, to urge National Societies to increase preparations for civil (or passive) defence of urban areas.<sup>76</sup> By the middle of the 1930s, National Societies were continuing to send in reports and information on such defence measures, allowing the *Review* to continue to share information between nations on the measures that societies could take to protect civilians.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, these transnational information networks were becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. As Zangger also noted, National Societies were proving reluctant to share information on more technical data like gas masks, being unwilling to divulge potential weaknesses to enemies.<sup>78</sup> The documentation centre was also reliant on donations from National Societies, and the *Review* issued various appeals for donations.<sup>79</sup> While the centre limped on until 1938, lack of funds eventually forced it to close.<sup>80</sup>

The outbreak of civil war in Spain brought further dispiriting news. In particular, Demolis noted, the aerial attacks on civilian populations, and the mass refugee problems which resulted from them, appeared to confirm humanitarians’ worst fears about aerial warfare, with the exception of the use of chemical weapons. Civilians were not simply collateral damage to violence, but were directly targeted by belligerents: quoting Phillipe Petain, Demolis noted that in

73 “Résolutions et vœux adoptés par la XVe Conférence Internationale de la Croix-Rouge Tokio, 20–29 octobre 1934”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 16, No. 191, 1934, p. 898.

74 “Projet l’appel a la conference de desarmement”, ICRC, CR159j.

75 The WDC sought to reach major agreements on arms limitations, and while delegates from national governments agreed on the necessity of reducing arms, they failed to agree on the precise mechanisms for achieving this. The withdrawal of Nazi Germany from the conference, according to Zara Steiner, marked “the end of the inter-war movement to disarm”: see Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919–1933*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 796.

76 Heinrich Zangger, “Considerations sur les taches des Societes nationales de la Croix-Rouge dans le domaine de la sauvegarde des populations et du secours aux gazes de guerre”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 16, No. 190, 1934, pp. 790–791.

77 For just a sample of the many articles devoted to “civil defence”, see “La défense passive en Italie”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 16, No. 192, 1934; “La défense passive en France”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 17, No. 194, 1935; “La défense passive en Allemagne”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 17, No. 199, 1935.

78 H. Zangger, above note 76, p. 792.

79 See, for instance, “Résolutions et vœux adoptés par la XVe Conférence Internationale de la Croix-Rouge Tokio, 20–29 octobre 1934”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 16, No. 191, 1934, p. 898.

80 D. Palmieri, above note 14, pp. 994–995.

modern warfare, the objective was “the destruction not of an army, but of a nation”.<sup>81</sup> The reports of aerial bombardments of Republican territories in Spain aroused international outrage, and renewed commitments by diplomats to seek the limiting or banning of aerial bombardment on civilian territories. In September 1938, almost a year before the outbreak of the Second World War, a League of Nations commission met to discuss “putting a stop to this inhuman practice”.<sup>82</sup> In hindsight, this commission may appear to herald the final, futile attempt of interwar internationalists to halt what by now seemed an inevitable march to conflict, and with it the destruction of civilian life. Similarly, given the destructive strategic bombing which belligerents waged between 1939 and 1945, the ICRC’s appeal in 1940 for combatants to avoid bombing civilians appears ineffectual in retrospect.<sup>83</sup> However, as the final section of this article will argue, the ICRC’s interwar work on civilian protection was more complex than the classic “declinist” narrative would reveal.

### Assessing the ICRC’s interwar efforts, 1919–39

Over the interwar period, the Movement attempted to improve civilian protection by, firstly, seeking technical measures to limit the effects of aerial and chemical weapons, and later by appealing for more comprehensive legal measures like the banning of aerial bombardment. Given the immense civilian casualties from aerial bombardment alone during the Second World War, these attempts may appear to have failed.<sup>84</sup> However, there are problems with this perspective, given the events of 1939–45. Certainly, there were key problems within the Movement’s early attempts at civilian protection, but these were wider than can be understood through a simplistic “success” or “failure” narrative.

On the one hand, one can argue that the war demonstrated the validity of the Red Cross’s concerns over these new weapons of war. The much-feared chemical attacks on urban areas did not occur, but Cramer and Micheli’s essential argument, that the pressures of warfare would lead nations to justify the mass killing of “enemy civilians” in spite of any pre-war agreements or liberal ideologies, was realized in horrifying detail: the Allies’ bombing campaigns against Germany and Japan emphasized that the “dehumanizing” of “enemy civilians” was not confined to the Axis nations. Besides the accuracy of its predictions, it is also misleading to blame the Movement for failing to protect civilians. As Blondel rightly argues, the ultimate responsibility for protection falls

81 L. Demolis, “A propos de la ‘Guerre Totale’”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 19, No. 222, 1937, p. 603.

82 “Records of the Nineteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly”, p. 14, LNA, R424/30988/36395.

83 “Appel concernant la protection de la population civile contre les bombardements aériens”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 22, No. 256, 1940.

84 The most comprehensive account of the strategic bombing campaign during the Second World War is Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945*, Allen Lane, London, 2013. See also “Interview with Richard Overy”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 97, No. 900, 2015.

on nation States: the ICRC can encourage States to respect humanitarian laws or norms, but it cannot take responsibility for when those States choose to ignore this encouragement.<sup>85</sup> Neither, to refer to the classic “realist” critique of internationalism, can one accuse the Red Cross’s attempts to limit civilian suffering from aerial bombardment of being particularly naive or overly idealistic.<sup>86</sup> As shown, much of this interwar work was premised on the perception that international institutions would not necessarily limit belligerents’ behaviour: both pessimism and optimism in the efficacy of international cooperation were key dynamics within the Movement’s approach to civilian protection.

Besides considering the “success” (or “failures”) of the Red Cross’s work protecting civilians from aerial bombardment, it is also important, from a broader intellectual perspective, to consider what this interwar work reveals about how the Movement (and the ICRC in particular) framed the wider concept of civilian protection. In doing so, one can see the ambiguous “progress” of the Movement’s approach to this issue. On the one hand, the *Review* highlighted the greater nuance in the ICRC’s understanding of the challenges and complexities in protecting civilian populations at the end of the interwar period.<sup>87</sup> The meeting of legal experts in Geneva had pointed many of these out, and the ICRC attempted to follow these discussions with another meeting of international lawyers in October 1937. This meeting discussed amending the current Geneva Conventions to include civilian populations. However, the commission decided that “the number of points on which the Geneva Convention of 1929 deserves to be improved or clarified is not sufficient to justify a complete revision”, and that due to the complexities of civilian protection, the issue justified its own convention.<sup>88</sup>

In 1939, one of the ICRC’s legal experts, Jean Pictet, provided a comprehensive summary of the key gaps in international law which threatened civilians in conflicts, these being the insecure definitions which delineated civilians and soldiers, the obsolete concepts of “battlefront” and “home front”, and the incomplete laws regarding aerial warfare.<sup>89</sup> Pictet stressed that the most “delicate but urgent task” was to define comprehensively who the civilian population was, as a basis for any future legal treaty. Moreover, he urged the necessity of outlawing the bombing of any non-military target and the importance of establishing an international institution or framework with sufficient moral and political authority to enforce these measures.<sup>90</sup> As a

85 J.-L. Blondel, above note 5, p. 464.

86 The original “realist” critique of interwar internationalism as “utopian” comes from the British civil servant and historian E. H. Carr’s work: see E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis: 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, Macmillan, London, 1939.

87 D. Palmieri, above note 14.

88 “Résolutions et vœux adoptés par la XVIe Conférence internationale de la Croix-Rouge, Londres 20–25 juin 1938”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 20, No. 235, 1938, p. 637.

89 Jean Pictet, “La protection juridique de la population civile en temps de guerre”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 21, No. 244, 1939.

90 *Ibid.*, pp. 283–286.

temporary measure, Pictet proposed a “modest extension” of the Geneva Conventions in order to guarantee sick and wounded civilians the same rights as sick and wounded combatants, with the former retaining their separate “non-combatant” status from the latter.<sup>91</sup> In another *Review* article the same year, Pictet provided his own proposed definitions for “civilians” and “soldiers”. What was significant about these definitions was that they acknowledged that not all civilians were the same: there were key differences between those who played an “active” part in wars (such as munitions factory workers) and the “passive” population who contributed virtually nothing to their nation’s war efforts (such as the elderly or children).<sup>92</sup> Pictet acknowledged that certain “active civilians” could be legitimately considered as collateral damage when they were carrying out activities which contributed to a nation’s war effort, such as when they were working in a munitions factory. However, he argued, as soon as those civilians ceased these activities or left spaces where they could be considered “active”, they could not be targeted: in other words, while buildings could be the target for bombardments, the individuals who worked within them could not.<sup>93</sup> For Pictet, delineating which identities and spaces constituted legitimate and illegitimate targets for military attack provided a way to reconcile the classical distinctions between civilians and the military in modern warfare.<sup>94</sup> Although Pictet’s interventions came too late in regard to the Second World War, he did play a major role in drafting GC IV in 1949, which defined civilians as “protected persons” under international law.<sup>95</sup>

While Pictet’s articles indicate the greater nuance that was appearing in the *Review*’s treatment of civilian protection, it is important not to over-emphasize the progression in the Movement’s approach to this issue. One of the major gaps in Pictet’s article, which he acknowledged, was the situation of civilian detainees.<sup>96</sup> Civilian detainees had represented the ICRC’s first intervention into civilian protection in the First World War. However, during the interwar period, the organization devoted far less attention to this problem compared to its concern about protecting civilians from aero-chemical warfare. The 11th International Conference of the Red Cross in 1923 resolved to establish parity in international law for protecting civilian and military prisoners.<sup>97</sup> In an article for the *Review* in 1921, Frederic Ferrière provided a detailed outline for the reasons why belligerents imprisoned civilians, the hazy legal categories in which these

91 *Ibid.*, p.273.

92 Jean Pictet, “La protection juridique de la population civile en temps de guerre”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 21, No. 246, 1939.

93 *Ibid.*, pp. 468–469.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 469.

95 On Pictet’s role in the drafting of GC IV and his commentaries on the Convention, see Robert Heinsch, “The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions of 1949”, in Robin Geiß and Andreas Zimmermann (eds), *Humanizing the Laws of War: The Red Cross and the Development of International Humanitarian Law*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2017.

96 J. Pictet, above note 89, p. 268.

97 “Résolutions et vœux votés par la XI<sup>me</sup> Conférence internationale de la Croix-Rouge”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 5, No. 53, 1923, pp. 899–900.

prisoners sat, and the particular humanitarian problems that different types of civilian detainees faced. While declaring that “there should be no civilian prisoners other than those who can bear arms”, Ferrière nevertheless recognized the incredible difficulties faced by humanitarians in a new era in which “modern war is no longer a war between armies, but a struggle between peoples”: as such, he continued, “the civilian is likely, in the future, to be as little spared as he was in the last war”.<sup>98</sup>

In 1934, the 15th International Conference of the Red Cross resolved that the ICRC should “take all necessary steps” to draw up an international convention to protect civilians in occupied territories, and to bring the matter to the attention of national governments.<sup>99</sup> The so-called Tokyo Draft (named after the city which held the conference) provided a basis for the 1949 GC IV.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, its adoption in the Movement in 1934 was a response to the failure of the 1929 Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War to include civilian detainees.<sup>101</sup> The Movement’s attempts to resolve this gap in international law failed to conclude any international convention before the Second World War, however.<sup>102</sup> Besides this particular failure to promote international agreements on civilian prisoners, one can also argue that Ferrière’s nuanced analysis of civilian protection was lacking in the Movement’s work in protecting civilians from aero-chemical warfare, which did not really engage with the complexities of civilian identity in war zones until the 1931 meeting of legal experts.

One of the significant omissions from the *Review*’s pages, particularly during the 1920s, was the issue of civilian protection for non-European populations. As argued already, the ICRC had generally ignored colonial warfare prior to 1914, and subsequently the suffering of civilian populations exposed to these particular forms of conflict. While the First World War had opened the organization’s eyes to the suffering of civilian war victims, it took several years for the ICRC to shed some of its Eurocentrism. The fact that the “experts” consulted by the Red Cross almost overwhelmingly represented European powers is one indication of this: at the first Brussels commission, Japan and Brazil were the only non-European powers present.<sup>103</sup> The Movement framed civilian protection in this period in terms of protecting urbanized and industrialized populations. While this concern was not explicitly Eurocentric, approaching civilian protection in this way effectively blinkered the Movement from the less spectacular yet more prevalent use of air power in colonial settings. In particular, it failed to anticipate the methods of “colonial policing”, where imperial nations like Britain used air power to intimidate and attack dispersed and isolated

98 Frederic Ferrière, “Projet d’une Convention internationale réglant la situation des civils tombés à la guerre au pouvoir de l’ennemi”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 5, No. 54, 1923.

99 “Résolutions et vœux adoptés par la XV<sup>e</sup> Conférence Internationale de la Croix-Rouge Tokio, 20–29 octobre 1934”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 16, No. 191, 1934, pp. 899–900.

100 R. Heinsch, above note 95, p. 31.

101 D. Palmieri, above note 14, p. 994.

102 R. Heinsch, above note 95, p. 31.

103 “Liste des experts”, *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 10, No. 110, 1928.

populations.<sup>104</sup> More broadly, in the 1920s the ICRC struggled to respond effectively to colonial conflicts which did not fit the classic definitions of international wars, and which imperial powers were keen to dismiss as internal security matters. Examples like the Rif War, where the Spanish military used gas against civilian populations, highlighted the double standard in the Movement's concerns about chemical weapons and civilians.<sup>105</sup> The *Review* did not find space for any specific condemnation of these chemical attacks. In 1926, however, it did publish a self-congratulatory report from the Spanish Red Cross about the hospitals that it had installed in Morocco, which had brought "the benefits of modern medical science" to the region: these had not only helped "propagate ... the basic principles of hygiene" to "the natives" (once their "instinctive mistrust" had been overcome), but were also "[contributing] in the noblest way to the final pacification" of previously hostile areas of the country.<sup>106</sup>

This is not to say that the ICRC completely ignored the suffering of non-Europeans. In 1921, ICRC delegate Maurice Gehri accompanied the inter-Allied commission that investigated atrocities against Muslim civilians in Anatolia. In the *Review*, Gehri concluded that "elements of the Greek occupation army had been pursuing for two months the extermination of the Muslim population of the [Yalova] peninsula".<sup>107</sup> In 1936, the ICRC also published protests from the Ethiopian Red Cross against Italy's use of mustard gas and aerial attacks on both towns and rural communities.<sup>108</sup> The ICRC used the same issue of the *Review* to reiterate its support for the banning of chemical weaponry and reminded readers of its work aimed at protecting civilians from such weapons.<sup>109</sup> Yet, despite this new development in the *Review*'s coverage of civilian protection, the ICRC did not expressly condemn Italy's violation of the Geneva Protocol, despite the urgings of the League of Nations. While a desire to uphold political neutrality, rather than overt racism, may have explained this silence, it highlighted the organization's ineffectiveness in approaching belligerents, like Fascist Italy, who lacked respect for international law.<sup>110</sup>

104 David Killingray, "A Swift Agent of Government': Air Power in British Colonial Africa, 1916–1939", *Journal of African History*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 1984.

105 For more on the Movement in the Rif War, see Francisco Javier Martínez-Antonio, "Weak Nation-States and the Limits of Humanitarian Aid: The Case of Morocco's Rif War, 1921–27", in Johannes Paulmann (ed.), *Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016.

106 Rodolphe Haccius, "L'œuvre de la Croix-Rouge espagnole au Maroc", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 8, No. 93, 1926, pp. 663–664. The following year, the *Review* published news of the commemorative postage stamps that the Spanish government issued to celebrate the Spanish Red Cross's contribution to the conflict, but again, it made no mention of civilian casualties during the war. See Florian Wexel, "Timbres de Croix-Rouge", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 9, No. 97, 1927.

107 "Mission d'enquete en Anatolie (12–22 mai 1921)", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 3, No. 31, 1921, p. 723.

108 "Protestation Ethiopienne", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 18, No. 208, 1936.

109 "Le droit des gens dans le conflit italo-éthiopien", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 18, No. 208, 1936, pp. 340–341.

110 Rainer Baudendistel, "Force versus Law: The International Committee of the Red Cross and Chemical Warfare in the Italo-Ethiopian War 1935–1936", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 80, No. 829, 1998, pp. 103–104.



This and the inattention to non-European populations is indicative of wider issues in the Red Cross's conception of civilian protection. While the ICRC's understandings of the complexities of "civilianization" and modern warfare had grown over the interwar period, its thinking continued to be dominated by binary categories like civilians and soldiers, combatants and non-combatants. This mindset, Palmieri argues, indicates the "traditionalist" ideas of warfare that maintained a grasp on the organization.<sup>111</sup> While talking of "the civilian population", the Movement primarily engaged with the threat facing one type of civilians: urbanized populations close to industrial centres. Moreover, while authors wrote of "new" forms of warfare, in reality the Movement remained wedded to the notion that belligerents attacked civilians because it fulfilled particular "military objectives", such as destroying a nation's war economy. They did not consider how other identities like race, political affiliation or gender could encourage particular forms of violence against specific civilians. In 1922, the ICRC's delegate in Greece, Rodolphe de Reding Biberegg, noted the gendered dynamics of violence he encountered among refugees arriving into Piraeus after the Greco-Turkish War. In the *Review*, de Reding commented that there were few men or young women among the refugee population, since the Turkish army had massacred the former and taken the latter into sexual slavery.<sup>112</sup> However, despite the euphemistic references to sexual violence in the Hague Conventions, the Movement did not seek to address and more clearly define these gaps in IHL.<sup>113</sup> In the 1930s, during the Spanish Civil War and the Second Sino-Japanese War in particular, atrocities against civilians, including sexual violence, torture and summary executions, were largely fuelled by the racial and political identities of these civilians.<sup>114</sup> The ICRC's responses to this violence were uneven. Its large-scale material efforts for Spanish refugees and political detainees were not replicated in invaded territories in China.<sup>115</sup> Perhaps more significantly, while the organization sent out pleas for belligerents not to bombard civilian areas, its response to reports of more intimate face-to-face violence was one of silence.<sup>116</sup> As Palmieri argues, the organization appeared to ignore, or failed to realize, the key difference between belligerents who sought merely to defeat their enemy and those who sought to destroy their enemy on the basis of the latter's ethnic, national or political identity.<sup>117</sup> These conceptual gaps

111 D. Palmieri, above note 14, pp. 995–996.

112 "Secours aux réfugiés grecs", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 4, No. 47, 1922, p. 956. See also a follow-up report on the sexual exploitation of these refugees, in "Traite des femmes et des enfants parmi les réfugiés d'Asie mineure", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 5, No. 54, 1923.

113 On contemporary IHL and sexual violence, see Gloria Gaggioli, "Sexual violence in Armed Conflicts: A Violation of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 96, No. 894, 2014, pp. 511–513.

114 On the "Red" and "White" atrocities committed during the Spanish Civil War, see Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939*, Phoenix, London, 2006.

115 On the ICRC's response to these two conflicts, see David Forsyth, *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 39–41.

116 For these appeals, see, for instance, "Conflit sino-japonais", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 20, No. 233, 1938, pp. 468–469.

117 D. Palmieri, above note 14, p. 995.

prefigured the organization's inadequate response to the Nazis' genocidal violence, in which killing civilians was not simply about fulfilling a particular military objective but about annihilating an entire "race" of people from existence.<sup>118</sup>

## Conclusions: Lessons learned?

Between 1939 and 1945, the Movement once again had to respond to a cataclysmic and inhuman war. As in 1919, the post-war period appeared to herald the prospect of an even deadlier weapon that placed civilian populations under the threat of even greater levels of harm: the atomic bomb. Following the successful signing of GC IV in 1949 – the first comprehensive treaty to define civilian populations as "protected persons" – the Movement's attention turned once more to solving the problems posed by the technological development of "indiscriminate" weaponry.<sup>119</sup> Even today, the problems posed by new technology continue to frame discussions around civilian protection. In 2012, the *Review* published an issue on the subject of new technologies, in which editor-in-chief Vincent Bernard noted how "the dazzling scientific and technical progress of recent decades has given rise to unprecedented means and methods of warfare".<sup>120</sup> There are clearly striking echoes between Bernard's quote and individuals in the 1930s, like Demolis, who claimed to be living "in an era of scientific and technical progress of armaments unparalleled in history".<sup>121</sup>

Further continuities between the pre- and post-1945 period can be seen in civilian protection in colonial settings. In spite of the introduction of GC IV, the ICRC faced key difficulties in protecting civilians during the process of European decolonization and the violence which accompanied or followed the end of formal imperial rule. When the ICRC intervened in the anti-colonial wars in Algeria and Kenya in the 1950s, it encountered colonial States who sought to circumvent GC IV by defining certain civilian populations as "terrorists", and these rebellions as "internal security" matters rather than civil war.<sup>122</sup> Although the ICRC's concern for non-European populations certainly increased after 1945, the limits of international law continued to impact its ability to translate this concern into action.<sup>123</sup>

118 On the ICRC and the Holocaust, see Jean-Claude Favez, *The Red Cross and the Holocaust*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999.

119 "Réunion d'experts pour la protection juridique des populations civiles", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 36, No. 424, 1954. See also the extensive archival files on the ICRC's attempts to limit or ban nuclear weapons: ICRC, BAG049-022.

120 Vincent Bernard, "Editorial: Science Cannot Be Placed Above Its Consequences", Vol. 94, No. 886, 2012, p. 458.

121 L. Demolis, "Les armements modernes et la protection des populations civiles", *Revue Internationale de la Croix-Rouge*, Vol. 21, No. 245, 1939, p. 403.

122 Fabian Klose, "The Colonial Testing Ground: The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Violent End of Empire", *Humanity*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2011.

123 The introduction of the 1977 Additional Protocols helped refine some of these legal gaps in civilian protection in non-international armed conflicts.

The history of the *Review* and the Movement's engagement with civilian protection is ambiguous, challenging either triumphalist or declinist narratives. There is no doubt that the structures of international humanitarian governance have become more sophisticated over the second half of the twentieth century, thanks to the proliferation of NGOs, the growth of international institutions and legal frameworks, and the increasingly "unimpeachable" moral authority of "humanitarian reason" in global and national politics.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, recent articles in the *Review* on civilian protection highlight the more nuanced scholarly literature from political scientists, anthropologists, historians and practitioners, which underpins the Movement's approach to the problems facing civilians in warfare.<sup>125</sup> Yet such developments cannot hide the fact that civilians remain as vulnerable to wartime violence as ever before. While scholars and humanitarians now understand the greater complexities of protecting civilians, this does not mean the international community is any closer to solving these problems. To refer to Andreas Wenger and Simon Mason's recent contribution to the *Review*, in modern civil and asymmetric wars and in new high-tech "digital warfare", the lines between civilians and combatants, war and peace, the battlefield and "the home", are increasingly fluid and unstable.<sup>126</sup> Humanitarians and peacekeepers thus face particular difficulties applying current IHL frameworks in contexts where State authority is weak, or virtually non-existent in the case of the Internet. Singular recommendations to humanitarian organizations, such as to focus more/less on peacekeeping or to abandon/strengthen traditional humanitarian principles like political neutrality, cannot alone solve these complex issues. Indeed, an understanding of the multifaceted reasons why belligerents target civilians demonstrates the difficulties of any single approach to protecting these populations.<sup>127</sup>

What, then, can we draw from the Red Cross's early approach to civilian protection, given the vastly different contexts in which today's Movement operates? The first "lesson" is the need to pay attention to these aforementioned "complexities", and to be attentive to the various threats that civilians face in different contexts. The Red Cross's approach to civilian protection in the interwar period demonstrates the problems that can emerge from interpreting civilians as a singular population, which can lead to humanitarians prioritizing the requirements of certain civilians over others. The Movement's belief that

124 Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, trans. Rachel Gomme, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2012.

125 See, for instance, A. Wenger and S. J. A. Mason, above note 3; Haidi Willmot and Scott Sheeran, "The Protection of Civilians Mandate in UN Peacekeeping Operations: Reconciling Protection Concepts and Practices", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 95, No. 891–892, 2013.

126 A. Wenger and S. J. A. Mason, above note 3.

127 For a summary of the debates about the role of principles of neutrality and the political role of humanitarianism, see Kate M. Bridges, "Between Aid and Politics: Diagnosing the Challenge of Humanitarian Advocacy in Politically Complex Environments – The Case of Darfur, Sudan", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 8, 2010. For a close analysis of this debate, see also Stuart Gordon and Antonio Donini, "Romancing Principles and Human Rights: Are Humanitarian Principles Salvageable?", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 97, No. 897–898, 2016.

aerial bombardment represented a significant threat to civilians in future wars was not incorrect, but by prioritizing the threat to civilians in urban areas, it lacked the conceptual tools for responding to violence against civilians in other contexts. While the *Review* noted instances of ethnic or gender-based violence against civilians before 1939, these findings did not translate into more concerted efforts to redress gaps in international law or to educate National Societies on these particular forms of “face-to-face” violence. Moreover, while the First World War had demonstrated some of the problems facing civilian detainees, the ICRC’s failure to distinguish the Nazis’ extermination camps from more typical sites of detention highlighted the gaps that continued to underpin the organization’s understandings of why belligerents targeted civilians, and the particular forms of violence this entailed. As the ICRC’s work on gender-based violence over the last twenty years has shown, while civilians possess common needs like food and water, “the effects of armed conflict impact differently on men [and] women”, to which one may add other identities such as nationality or ethnicity: far from representing an abandonment of the principle of impartiality, appreciating these differences allows humanitarians to recognize the “specific needs and vulnerabilities of each category of victim in order to be able to reach, assist, and protect them appropriately”.<sup>128</sup>

If the Red Cross’s understandings of civilian populations and warfare in this period were far too narrow, it is important to remember that its proposed solutions to protecting civilians were more expansive. Recognizing the specific problems posed by aero-chemical warfare, the Red Cross sought technical and legal solutions, and consulted a range of “experts” both within and outside the Movement. This flexible approach to protection is the second “lesson” from the past. The pragmatism and idealism that informed the Movement’s proposed solutions to civilian protection remains a fundamental requirement for practitioners today. Humanitarians must remain committed to the legal principles and wider values underlying IHL, which explain why civilians must be protected. But, as in the interwar period, humanitarians operate in a world where belligerents may not share this same respect: indeed, the chemical attacks in Syria provide damning evidence that the Movement’s concerns about the legal protocols on gas warfare were by no means fanciful. In these circumstances, it is vital that those seeking to protect civilians embrace a range of legal and “technical” means which must vary according to specific circumstances: these measures may range from the delegate’s traditional role of maintaining a “presence” in war zones to more proactive steps like negotiating “safe zones” with local warlords and “peacekeeping” forces, or engaging in forms of development work which can prevent the material and psychological factors that encourage violence against civilian populations.

The Movement’s attempts to build networks of expertise in the interwar period may have been marked by their narrow conception of civilians and warfare, but they reflected a valid observation: that efforts to solve the problems

128 Charlotte Lindsey, *Women Facing War*, ICRC, Geneva, 2001, pp. 36–37.

of civilian protection must go beyond the powers of humanitarian actors alone. With the benefit of hindsight, one can see that the interwar Red Cross needed to go further than consulting legal “experts” working for the League of Nations or the military leadership and scientists connected to National Societies. The limits of these early networks serve to reiterate the widespread calls in recent years for humanitarianism to address accountability to its “recipients” and to incorporate these populations, local NGOs and national staff into the decision-making process.<sup>129</sup> There are obviously key challenges to incorporating “local actors” and civilians themselves into the structures of international humanitarian governance,<sup>130</sup> but if international humanitarian actors hope to generate targeted protection measures, they must first understand the specific factors that shape violence against civilians in those contexts. To do this, they must make the effort to incorporate the views and perspectives of the key actors in these conflicts, which includes the agency of civilians themselves.<sup>131</sup> As Charlotte Lindsey rightly points out in regard to women in conflict, there is incredible diversity among groups that humanitarians may traditionally view as passive “victims”. While “civilian population” may be a convenient label, it is more accurate to distinguish *civilians* (in the plural) from *the civilian* (as a singular concept). Doing so allows us to appreciate the exact “needs” of particular individuals and the specific social or economic skills they may possess which can enable their resilience in the face of war, and to understand exactly how such individuals participate directly or indirectly in wars (and thus why they may be targets of violence).<sup>132</sup> In regard to the *Review*’s role in supporting this process, the articles in the journal from the 1920s and 1930s are filled with experts and humanitarians who speak on behalf of civilian populations. The voices of civilians themselves are strikingly absent, however. In this regard, recent issues of the *Review* that contain civilian “voices” from the battlefield represent an important step in re-dressing the implicit power imbalances in humanitarian action.<sup>133</sup>

129 See, for example, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report: Focus on Local Actors, the Key to Humanitarian Effectiveness*, Geneva, 2015, available at: [http://ifrc-media.org/interactive/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/1293600-World-Disasters-Report-2015\\_en.pdf](http://ifrc-media.org/interactive/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/1293600-World-Disasters-Report-2015_en.pdf).

130 Claudia McGoldrick, “The State of Conflicts Today: Can Humanitarian Action Adapt?”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 97, No. 900, 2015, pp. 1200–1206.

131 On the agency of civilians in war zones, see A. Wenger and S. J. A. Mason, above note 3, pp. 841–846.

132 C. Lindsey, above note 128, pp. 212–213.

133 See, for example, “Life in a War-Torn City: Residents of Aleppo Tell Their Stories”, *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 98, No. 901, 2016.

