

ISSN 0165-070X
Vol. LX–2013–Issue 3

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NETHERLANDS
INTERNATIONAL
LAW REVIEW

INTERNATIONAL LAW
CONFLICT OF LAWS

ASSER PRESS

Moral Responsibility & Military Effectiveness

Edited by

Herman Amersfoort, René Moelker, Joseph Soeters & Désirée Verweij

The missions of armed forces are required to be effective. Thus missions are oriented to objectives that help prevent, contain or solve problems. A soldier, for example, who skillfully neutralizes his or her target is not effective when the problem is not prevented, contained or solved. Political, legal and moral awareness is important to the soldier, because doing things right is not the same as doing right or rightful things. The soldier wishes to avoid unlawful orders, but also tries to avoid casualties among non-combatants. Normally responsibility lies with higher authorities, but the fact remains that the soldier is the one who pulls the trigger. It is not simply a matter of veering between two evils, because a mission that is without moral grounds should not have been initiated in the first place and when pursued against better knowing it will probably lose effectiveness in the end. It is impossible to make compromises here. But it is also not possible to foresee all the consequences of military action, and unanticipated consequences can easily backfire. Dilemmas are bound to occur when the soldier is caught up in blurred conflict situations. This volume tries to add to our understanding of the problem of creating and maintaining a balance between effectiveness and moral responsibility.

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www.asser.nl/AsserPress/?978-90-6704-345-8

ISBN 978-90-6704-345-8

Paperback, viii + 300 pp., price: EUR 25.00

Recommended citation: NILR

The *Netherlands International Law Review (NILR)* is one of the world's leading journals in the fields of public and private international law. It is published three times a year, and features peer-reviewed, innovative, and challenging articles, case notes, commentaries, book reviews and overviews of the latest legal developments in The Hague. The *NILR* was established in 1953 and has since become a valuable source of information for scholars, practitioners and anyone who wants to stay up-to-date of the most important developments in these fields.

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The *NILR* is published by T.M.C. Asser Press, in cooperation with the T.M.C. Asser Instituut, and is distributed by Cambridge University Press. The T.M.C. Asser Instituut, an inter-university institute for Private and Public International Law and European Law, was founded in 1965 by the law faculties of the Dutch universities. The Institute is responsible for the promotion of education and research in international law.

Editorial Office: *Netherlands International Law Review*, c/o T.M.C. Asser Instituut, P.O. Box 30461, 2500 GL The Hague, The Netherlands; Tel. +31(70)3420300; Fax +31(70)3420359; E-mail: nilr@asser.nl.

Indexed in: The *Netherlands International Law Review* is abstracted and/or listed in the *International Bibliography of Social Sciences*, *IBZ*, *International Political Science Abstracts*, *ARC-ERA Journal List*, *Peace Research Abstracts*, *JustCite*, *Index to Foreign Legal Publications* and *Westlaw UK Legal Journals Index*.

Distribution

The *Netherlands International Law Review* and the *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law* are distributed for T.M.C. ASSER PRESS by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

The *Netherlands International Law Review* and the *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law* are also available online through the Cambridge Journals Online service. This service can be found at <http://journals.cambridge.org/NILR>.

Subscription rates and specimen copies: Combined annual subscription to the *Netherlands International Law Review* (Vol. LX, 2013) and to the *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law* (Vol. XLIV, 2013): print + online: GBP 394.00 / USD 666.00 / EUR 581.00; print only: GBP 372.00 / USD 642.00 / EUR 547.00; online only: GBP 356.00 / USD 603.00 / EUR 524.00. Subscription orders and requests for specimen copies should be sent to: Cambridge University Press, The Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK, E-mail: journals@cambridge.org; or in the USA, Canada and Mexico: Cambridge University Press, Journals Fulfillment Department, 100 Brook Hill Drive, West Nyack, New York 10994-2133, E-mail: subscriptions_newyork@cambridge.org.

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ISSN 0165-070X

Library of Congress catalogue card number LC 79-65199

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