

# PEOPLE ON WAR

## Country report Afghanistan

**ICRC worldwide consultation on the rules of war**

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Report by Greenberg Research, Inc.

EVEN WARS HAVE LIMITS EVEN WARS HAVE LIMITS EVEN WARS HAVE LIMITS EVEN WARS HAVE



INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

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## About the People on War project

To mark the 50th anniversary of the modern Geneva Conventions (on 12 August 1999), the ICRC launched its People on War project with the aim of building greater respect for fundamental humanitarian principles. At centre stage is a worldwide consultation giving the general public a chance to air their views on the many facets of war. The idea was that civilians and combatants alike would be able to share their experiences, express their opinions on what basic rules should apply in war, discuss why those rules sometimes break down and look at what the future holds.

With this in mind, the ICRC commissioned Greenberg Research, Inc. to design a research programme that would enable people to be heard in the most effective way possible. Under the guidance of Greenberg Research, ICRC staff and Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers carried out this consultation in 12 countries (Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Colombia, El Salvador, Georgia/Abkhazia, Israel, the occupied territories and the autonomous territories, Lebanon, Nigeria, Philippines, Somalia and South Africa), conducting in-depth, face-to-face interviews, group discussions and national public opinion surveys. Surveys on the basis of a questionnaire only were conducted in a further five countries (France, Russian Federation, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States) in order to reflect these people's perceptions of war.

Greenberg Research analysts then prepared a series of Country Reports on the basis of the findings. The reports open up this new, important discourse to a wider audience, while remaining conscious of the need to protect the safety of all those who participated.

By making this consultation public, the ICRC hopes to initiate a local and international debate on the humanitarian aspects of war - a debate that should be joined by the major political players, international and non-governmental organizations and aid specialists.

## Greenberg Research, Inc.

Greenberg Research is an opinion research firm that has worked for over two decades to help organizations and leaders around the world advance their goals in the face of rapid change. It specializes in using advanced methods of opinion research - surveys, focus groups and in-depth interviews - to help form strategies for political parties, corporations and non-governmental organizations.

Greenberg Research has extensive experience in Europe and the United States, but also in the Middle East, Asia, southern Africa and Central and South America. It has conducted research in war-torn, politically complex and remote settings. In its work for corporations and non-governmental organizations, it has explored a broad range of global issues, including landmines, genetic engineering, climate change, race and gender relations, trade and information technologies.

**The opinions expressed in this report are not those of the ICRC. The ICRC retained Greenberg Research, Inc. to design and oversee the People on War consultation. Greenberg Research compiled and analysed the results and is responsible for the content and interpretation.**

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## Country context

Twenty years of war in Afghanistan can be divided into four distinct phases: the 1979 invasion of the country by the Soviet Union and the decade of war that followed until the Soviet departure in February 1989; three years of armed conflict between the *mujahideen* (resistance fighters) and the Soviet-supported communist government until its collapse in April 1992; two years of civil war between Afghan factions; and five years of fighting still ongoing between the Northern Coalition and the Taliban. Taken together, these conflicts have killed an estimated 1.7 million people, permanently disabled another 2 million and driven more than 5 million from their homes.<sup>1</sup>

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan followed a power struggle in the late 1970s among competing communist parties to rule the country. A coup by the communist Khalq party resulted in the imposition of extreme land and education reforms, which almost immediately sparked an uprising by resistance fighters (*mujahideen*). For 18 months, the Soviets tried vainly to stabilize the regime by supporting it with money, arms and advisers.

In December 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, set up a local government of their liking, and went to war with the *mujahideen*. Despite a great advantage in sophisticated air power, munitions and armed forces that eventually numbered almost 120,000 soldiers, the Soviets were never able to bring the country under control. The *mujahideen* were composed of about 90,000 fighters belonging to several hundred armed guerrilla groups who were isolated from each other both ethnically and geographically but drawn together under the banner of the *jihad* (holy war).

Afghanistan was the last major battleground of the Cold War, as Western countries – and particularly the United States – continued to provide financial support and advanced weaponry to the *mujahideen*. The Soviets only began to extricate themselves in 1986, when Mikhail Gorbachev determined that the war could not be won and that the “bleeding wound” had to be staunched (15,000 Soviets died in the war, another 35,000 were wounded). Efforts by the United Nations (UN) to negotiate a settlement, which had begun in 1982, finally bore fruit when in 1988 the Geneva Accords were signed, bringing an end to hostilities.

By 1989, the Soviets had completely withdrawn from the country. Three years later, the *mujahideen* eventually captured Kabul and overthrew the communist regime. With that victory, the cause that had bound the various groups of *mujahideen* together – the *jihad* against the foreign invader and its government – no longer existed. The two years following the victory of the *mujahideen* were marked by constant fighting among a number of factions, each of which struggled to take control of a portion of the country, but none of which ultimately emerged as a national power.

The fourth and ongoing stage of the war began in 1994 with the emergence of the Taliban, a conservative Sunnite Pushtun group, that draws its name from a Persian word meaning “seekers of the truth”. Beginning in the south and then moving north-east and west, Taliban forces took control in Kabul in late September 1996. They moved immediately to impose a strict regime based on Islamic law, the *Sharia*. The civil war continues today, with the Taliban fighting the Northern Coalition, which mainly comprises Tajik fighters, but also some Uzbeks, Hazaras and other groups. Today, the Taliban controls more of Afghanistan than any regime since the communists assumed power in 1978.

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<sup>1</sup> Brogan, Patrick, *World Conflicts*, Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1998, p. 123.

## Country methodology

The findings in this report are based on a consultation carried out by the ICRC in Afghanistan under the supervision of Greenberg Research. Additional assistance was provided by the ICRC delegation in Peshawar, Pakistan, in particular in carrying out interviews among Afghan refugees. The aim was to assess the impact of armed conflict on people's lives and to allow people to share their personal experiences and opinions on a range of issues, from the armed conflict itself and the limits of warfare, to the impact of international law, including the Geneva Conventions.

The consultation was particularly challenging given that war has been ravaging the country for more than 20 years, during which almost no countrywide research has been conducted, and the last census figures were collected in the 1970s. Greenberg Research worked with experts involved in the last census and senior ICRC Afghan staff to develop a sample design that was as representative as possible of the present population, while taking into consideration that some areas are still off-limits owing to ongoing fighting. AFTAB Associates (Pvt.) Ltd., a research firm based in Lahore, Pakistan, put the data in electronic form and transcribed and translated the audiotapes of the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The BBC Afghan Education Project, based in Peshawar, provided two professional moderators (one male and one female) for some of the focus groups and also helped organize the group discussions and interviews in the refugee camps in Peshawar. More than 70 ICRC Afghan staff members conducted the survey and in-depth interviews.

The Afghanistan consultation consisted of three elements:

- Nine **focus groups** (FG), mostly organized by ICRC field staff. Focus group participants included: religious teachers and female medical doctors in Kabul; farmers and Taliban fighters in Jalalabad; Northern Coalition fighters and housewives in Faizabad; former *mujahideen* fighters and two groups of refugee women with varying levels of education in Peshawar. The focus groups were moderated by a male and a female professional moderator, a senior ICRC Afghan staff member (man), and an Afghan woman in Kabul who was trained and supervised by Greenberg Research. The focus groups were held between 12 June and 18 July 1999.
- Twenty **in-depth interviews** (IDI) conducted by ICRC staff after receiving training from Greenberg Research. Participants included a shopkeeper, a person displaced by the war, local journalists, an artist and combatants. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. All interviews were completed between 26 June and 17 July 1999.
- A **quantitative national survey** conducted among 995 respondents of at least 18 years of age, 100 of which were carried out in refugee camps in the Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan and 50 among combatants in Afghanistan. The surveys were conducted in Pashto or Dari and took place between 3 and 13 July 1999.<sup>2</sup>

The results of the survey, focus groups and in-depth interviews form the basis for this report. This research is unique as the data set represents one of the few recent attempts to interview Afghan men and women countrywide and on both sides of the front lines. Respondents seemed genuinely interested in participating in the survey. The interviewers described the great majority of respondents (78 per cent) as "extremely interested" and 13 per cent as "cooperative". Less than 10 per cent of those surveyed were described as "reluctant", "indifferent" or "hostile".

<sup>2</sup> Percentages reported here are subject to a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points (at a 95 in 100 confidence level). Results in smaller segments, such as the 513 respondents who report that their houses were looted are subject to an error of +/- 6.4 percentage points. These estimates are based on population values of 50 per cent. Obviously, many reported percentages are lower or higher than that; higher percentages would have a smaller sampling error. For example, a reported percentage of 90 per cent for the total population would have a sampling error of +/- 2.6 percentage points.

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## Executive summary

Twenty years of war in Afghanistan have unleashed a never-ending wave of destruction that has swamped traditional protections for civilians and swept aside long-accepted rules of wartime behaviour. No matter the armies or combatants that face each other, nor the goals they profess, civilians in Afghanistan have been at risk like few other peoples in the world.

Afghans have certainly not rejected their overwhelming belief in Islam and its principles, which strictly forbid attacks on civilians and prisoners. If anything, the seemingly endless violence appears to have bound them closer to their faith. Nor have they consciously set out to violate the rules of war or to destroy their neighbours, their villages and their country. A vast majority voice strong convictions that civilians must be protected during wartime, and grieve over the physical and psychological destruction of their country – and in particular, the loss of a generation of young people who have known nothing but war.

Three essential elements of the Afghan war help to explain how the barrier meant to protect civilians has crumbled. First, 20 years of constant conflict have created an environment in which civilians have few, if any, places left to escape harm. The Soviet army set the pattern when, after its invasion in 1979, it introduced powerful weapons and adopted a “scorched earth” policy that inevitably caught civilians in the crossfire. In the decade of factional fighting that has followed the departure of Soviet troops, confusion, revenge and a deepening cycle of violence have combined to produce a war which, like a firestorm, has destroyed everything in its path.

Second, the Afghan war has been fought by ever-changing forces made up of young men and boys, many of whom had never handled a weapon until the day they were recruited or forced to pick up a gun and fight. In a fluid war situation, combatants unschooled in the rules of war, incapable of making mature decisions and unquestioning in their response to orders have vastly increased the potential for attacks on civilians, whether intentional or not.

Third, and most important, for two decades a sense of mission firmly grounded in Islam has shaped the behaviour of the protagonists in the war — from the original *mujahideen*, who came together to expel the Soviet invaders, to the Taliban forces and Northern Coalition fighters who have spent the last five years fighting each other to take control of the country. What Afghan combatants see as their quest to defeat evil – no matter its form or nationality – has placed at risk all those who do not believe in or who fail to offer active support for the cause. Simply put, the power of faith has overwhelmed the rules of war.

These are the major findings of the ICRC consultation in Afghanistan:

**The context of war.** Afghan attitudes towards war have been shaped by the extraordinary power of Islam, deeply held suspicions about the influence of foreign powers, and – as the war has dragged on – a growing tendency to blame Afghan leaders for the country's troubles.

- *The power of Islam.* No aspect of the war in Afghanistan can be properly understood outside of the context of the people's extraordinarily powerful belief in Islam. Islamic principles and teachings dominate Afghan attitudes towards the rules and conduct of war.
  - *External powers.* Centuries of foreign incursions into their strategically located country have left Afghans convinced that foreign powers are responsible for the devastating conflicts in their country.
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- *Failure of Afghan leaders.* After a decade of internecine warfare, Afghans are questioning the motivations and goals of their countrymen whom they see as responsible for prolonging the war.

**Total war.** The war has engulfed the whole of Afghanistan, leaving a trail of broken lives and barren landscapes in its wake. The war took a terrible toll on the country and its peoples. It was a conflict without end that devastated the country and forever scarred its inhabitants.

- Eighty-five per cent of respondents say they lived in an area where fighting occurred. Forty-four per cent report living in an area that came under enemy control.
- Eighty-three per cent of Afghan respondents say the war forced them to leave their homes. Seventy per cent say they experienced serious property damage during the war.
- More than half of respondents (53 per cent) report that a member of their immediate family was killed during the conflict. Fifty-nine per cent report losing contact with a close relative, and 16 per cent report knowing someone who was raped.
- One in three respondents (32 per cent) report being wounded, almost half (43 per cent) say they were tortured, and more than one in five say they were imprisoned.
- The dominant terms used to describe the conflict are “disruptive” (50 per cent), “uncertainty” and “horrible” (both 31 per cent) and “confusing” (20 per cent).
- Almost one-quarter of Afghans surveyed (23 per cent) have been combatants in the war.<sup>3</sup>

**Women’s roles and reality.** Although few Afghan women have been combatants, they have endured an extraordinary burden during 20 years of war in Afghanistan. The suffering women have experienced appears to have made them more willing than Afghan men to sanction attacks on communities and combatants.

- Although only 8 per cent were combatants, compared with 37 per cent of men, three in ten women report that they were wounded during the fighting and more than one-third (36 per cent) say they were tortured.
- Fifty-seven per cent of Afghan women say that combatants should leave civilians alone during wartime, compared with 68 per cent of men.
- Nineteen per cent of Afghan women — but only 7 per cent of men — say they think that captured enemy combatants sometimes deserve to die.
- Nearly four in ten Afghan women (39 per cent) say they would not help or save the life of a wounded or surrendering enemy combatant who had killed someone close to them. Only 25 per cent of men agree.
- Thirty-nine per cent of women — versus 26 per cent of men — say that captured combatants can be subjected to torture.

**A generation lost to war.** One of the most distressing consequences of the 20-year war for Afghans is its impact on their youth.

<sup>3</sup> This figure includes 50 additional combatants that have been weighted to the observed percentage of combatants in the base sample. The combatant category is self-reported, that is, respondents determined themselves whether they qualified as “combatants”.

- Afghans are deeply concerned about the culture of violence that surrounds their children.
- Respondents in focus groups consistently highlighted the destruction of their schools and loss of educational opportunities as a devastating impact of the war.
- There is overwhelming support for the idea that no Afghan should be allowed to enter combat before the age of 20. This view is held by 76 per cent of all respondents, and by 67 per cent of combatants.

**Limits in war.** Afghans display a realistic ambivalence about the protection of civilians during wartime in light of their own devastating experiences. Their suffering, as well as the tenets of their Islamic faith, leads them to feel that civilians *ought* to be protected. The conflict between the ideal and the real produces ambivalent convictions and beliefs among Afghans.

- Almost two-thirds of Afghan respondents (62 per cent) say that combatants should “attack only enemy combatants and leave civilians alone”. One-third of respondents adopt the more pragmatic attitude that civilians should be “avoided as much as possible”, and only 3 per cent say that both combatants and civilians are fair game. In the focus groups and in-depth interviews, combatants and civilians stated flatly that attacks on civilians should be prohibited – war should be confined to battlefields.
- Only 2 per cent of Afghans say everything is allowed in war; the overwhelming majority believe that certain actions are unacceptable. Of that majority, almost three-quarters (74 per cent) say these actions should be barred because they are “wrong”.
- Seventy-eight per cent say certain actions are wrong because they are against their religion. Forty-five per cent of Afghans cite human rights, and nearly one-third (31 per cent) refer to local beliefs and culture.
- More than three-quarters of Afghans reject attacks on civilians who provide food and shelter to enemy combatants or who transport ammunition for them. Eighty-six per cent say that attacking the enemy in populated villages or towns knowing that many civilians would be killed is wrong. Only 8 per cent say it is “part of war”.
- Afghans believe that civilians who voluntarily aid the enemy do not warrant the same level of protection as those who were forced to do so. Three times as many respondents sanction attacks on civilians who voluntarily transport ammunition for the enemy than do those who are coerced (31 per cent compared with 10 per cent). In focus groups and in-depth interviews, respondents explained that civilians who help the enemy are actually “participating in war”.

**Limits on weapons.** Afghans are adamant in their opposition to the use of weapons that indiscriminately harm civilians.

- Almost one in five (19 per cent) volunteer that all weapons should be banned. Forty-six per cent say landmines should never be used. One in four respondents reject the use of napalm. One in five volunteer that cluster bombs, rockets and missiles – all of which have been extensively used during the war – should never be used in battle.

**Treatment of captured combatants.** The great majority of those surveyed insist that captured combatants should never be harmed. Despite Islamic teachings which dictate that captured

combatants must be protected, however, a significant minority of Afghans accept the abuse of captured combatants, in particular the use of torture.

- In the survey, only 13 per cent of respondents say they think that captured enemy combatants sometimes deserve to die. Similarly, only 19 per cent sanction the killing of captured combatants by one side in a conflict if the other side is doing the same.
- Two-thirds of respondents (65 per cent) say they would save the life of a surrendering enemy combatant who had killed a person close to them, but almost one in three (31 per cent) say they would not. The same holds true when respondents are asked if they would help a wounded enemy combatant who had killed someone close to them (63 per cent compared with 33 per cent).
- Three in ten respondents believe that captured combatants can be subjected to torture in order to obtain important military information; 64 per cent think otherwise.
- Almost a quarter of Afghan respondents (22 per cent) say they have been imprisoned during the war, and a near majority (44 per cent) say they have lived under enemy control. Of this group, only 15 per cent say they were treated correctly, one in three (31 per cent) report being physically injured and two in three (65 per cent) say they were personally mistreated.
- Nearly nine in ten respondents (89 per cent) say that captured enemy combatants have the right to be visited by a representative of an independent organization, but only 10 per cent of those surveyed who were actually imprisoned confirm that they received such visits.
- Afghan women appear more willing than men to accept mistreatment of captured combatants. Thirty-five per cent of women say that captured combatants can be subjected to torture. Only 25 per cent of men say the same.
- Respondents point to strict Islamic guidelines on the treatment of captured combatants – and rewards for those who abide by them. Islamic teachings, however, sanction a two-tiered system of treatment for captured combatants: one set of rules for those who embrace Islam, another for those who do not.

**Geneva Conventions.** There is little consciousness in Afghanistan of the Geneva Conventions or other international treaties governing war.

- One in four respondents (24 per cent) say they have heard of the Geneva Conventions, while 62 per cent say they have not. Of those aware of them, 85 per cent describe them accurately – making it one in five Afghans overall who have a working understanding of the Geneva Conventions.
- Men are more likely than women to have heard of the Geneva Conventions (29 per cent compared with 19 per cent), a reflection perhaps of their more frequent exposure to imprisonment and combat. Women who are aware of them, on the other hand, are more likely than men to describe them accurately (96 per cent compared with 78 per cent). Recognition also rises with the level of a respondent's education.
- When asked to describe the Geneva Conventions, more than four in ten respondents (43 per cent) volunteer that they are meant to help limit or stop wars or promote peace. A higher percentage offer more specific descriptions; 26 per cent say the Geneva Conventions help

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protect the wounded, 21 per cent say they help protect captured combatants and another 20 per cent say they help protect civilians and victims of war.

- Afghan respondents are evenly split when asked about the efficacy of the Geneva Conventions. After being read a description of the Conventions, 44 per cent say they help prevent wars from getting worse, while 48 per cent say they make no real difference. Half of the respondents who were imprisoned or lived under enemy control (50 per cent) have faith in the Geneva Conventions, compared with only 34 per cent of those who did not have these experiences.

**Punishment of war crimes.** There is little consensus among Afghans as to the punishment of those who have committed war crimes.

- Fifty-six per cent of respondents say there are rules in war so important that those who violate them deserve to be punished. Fully one-third (33 per cent) disagree, however, perhaps reflecting the desire among Afghans to put the past behind them.
- Afghans who believe there are laws important enough to warrant punishment for the perpetrators are referring to international law (47 per cent), while 26 per cent cite religious tenets and 19 per cent Afghan law.
- More than seven in ten Afghans (71 per cent) say that people who have violated the rules of war should be put on trial. Twenty per cent, however, say that war criminals should either be granted amnesty or forgiven.
- Afghans believe overwhelmingly that their country's institutions should be responsible for punishing those who violate the law of war. A total of 79 per cent of respondents say that the Afghan courts, government, military or civilians themselves should judge war criminals. Only 11 per cent of those surveyed would refer such matters to an international criminal court.

**The ICRC/Red Cross/Red Crescent and international organizations.** Years of helping Afghans who remain in their country and those who have fled to neighbouring countries have left the ICRC/Red Cross/Red Crescent not only widely known but also well respected by the people of Afghanistan.

- More than eight in ten respondents (81 per cent) could identify the red cross emblem.
  - Thirty-seven per cent say the emblem protects all who need help, while another 18 per cent say it helps protect those living in conflict areas, refugees and civilians more generally. A total of 44 per cent of respondents associate it with protecting and helping the sick and wounded and medical personnel and vehicles.
  - The ICRC/Red Crescent and the UN are given shared credit for doing the most throughout the war to help Afghan civilians.
  - Forty-four per cent of respondents say the UN played the biggest role in helping civilians cope with the war; 40 per cent cite the ICRC/Red Crescent.
  - Afghans would turn to the ICRC/Red Crescent and the UN (40 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively) for help or protection if their homes and towns were threatened. Sixteen per cent of respondents say they would appeal for help to religious leaders, and one in ten say they would turn to foreign countries or humanitarian organizations in general.
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**Looking outward.** In an ironic twist of history – Afghans are prepared to turn to foreign powers and the international community for help in bringing peace to their country.

- More than two-thirds of respondents (68 per cent) say they want the international community to intervene more in the future to help civilians in the throes of war. Only 8 per cent of Afghans say that this kind of assistance should be curtailed; 14 per cent say it should be stopped altogether.
  - Afghans remain optimistic for the future: only 17 per cent of those surveyed predict there will be more war. More than half of respondents (58 per cent) say that there will be peace.
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## The context of war

In the past 20 years, Afghans have endured an endless succession of wars: the 1979-1989 fight to drive out the Soviet Union military forces; three years of armed conflict between the *mujahideen* and the Soviet-supported communist government; two years of civil war among Afghan factions; and since 1994, the fighting between the Taliban and the Northern Coalition. Only suffering and destruction have remained constant, as the players, goals and battlefields have shifted time and again.

Through all of this, two critical elements have combined to shape Afghan attitudes towards war: an almost absolute and extraordinarily powerful belief in Islam and a strong conviction that foreign powers are responsible for the conflicts that have ripped apart the country. In the struggle to expel the Soviet troops and then to overthrow the Soviet-supported communist regime, these elements combined in the form of a *Jihad*, as Afghans were brought together in a shared enterprise to rid their country of an invader.

Today, the power of Islam and the desire for independence are no less strong than they were in 1979. But as the war has moved into its third and fourth phases – and, as it has dragged on in the past several years – Afghans have added a new dimension: growing anger at their countrymen who are keeping the conflict alive. With it, a new, more complex and disturbing picture of war has emerged.

### The power of Islam

No aspect of the war in Afghanistan – indeed no aspect of Afghan life – can be properly understood outside of the context of Islam. In a country composed of more than 20 ethnic groups that militate against any kind of central control, Islam is the glue that has held the country together. It is the religion of all but a relative handful of Afghans.<sup>4</sup> Its rituals shape the daily routine from the most remote mountain villages to the capital city of Kabul. Children are taught to recite passages of the Muslim holy book, the Quran, before they can read. And — apart from giving one's life for a *jihad* (holy war) — few aspirations in life are considered more noble than Islamic scholarship.

In wartime, as in peace, Islam has been no less powerful a force. Throughout the war against the Soviet Union and the communist regime that followed, the *jihad* to defend the Islamic way of life was oftentimes the only goal shared by the disparate, fragmented *mujahideen*.<sup>5</sup> After the communist government was overthrown, Afghans fought among themselves to control their country, every faction invoking Islam in its quest to take power in Kabul. For the current Taliban government, Islam has served as the *sine qua non* of its drive to win control of the country; it aims to revive traditional ways through a strict interpretation of Islamic law, the *Sharia*.

The importance of Islam – as a justification or framework for people's views and behaviour in wartime – shines through the ICRC consultation. No matter the question asked nor the opinion expressed, focus group participants almost automatically cited Islamic texts, laws, aphorisms and stories of the Prophet Muhammad to justify their views. Islam seeps into the language people use to describe the war. Afghan participants in the in-depth research, for example, said that those who lost their lives – civilian and combatant alike – were "martyred", not "killed".

In focus groups and in-depth interviews, participants generally offered nuanced explanations of their opinions about why human beings are fair targets during wartime. But attacks on the physical institutions of Islam – mosques and religious schools, for example – are swiftly, unequivocally and harshly condemned. Fully 92 per cent of survey respondents say that attacking religious or historical monuments

<sup>4</sup> There is no reliable numerical estimate of the Muslim population of Afghanistan. "With the exception of a small number of Jews related to Bukharan Jews of Central Asia, Sikhs, and Hindus, Afghanistan has been one of the most uniformly Muslim states in the entire eastern Muslim world." Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid*, Westview Press, 1998, p. 70. The best understanding of Afghanistan's many ethnic groups, divisions and languages can be found in Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Princeton University Press, 1973.

<sup>5</sup> "...the factor that gave the resistance the will and passion to survive against the Soviet army was their Islamic faith." Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid*, p. 147.

during fighting is wrong – a higher percentage than those who condemn any attacks on human beings. Some participants explain the behaviour of those who launch certain kinds of attacks – be they against shrines, civilians or captured combatants – by flatly denying that the perpetrators could be Muslims: “...those who attack local people are not Muslim.” (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul) “Our country has been destroyed... Innocent people are killed in war. It is wrong, 100 per cent wrong. [Those who attack civilians] are non-Muslims.” (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar) “...the destruction of cultural heritage is also against the rules of war. This is not the work of Muslims, and if someone is doing it he is not Muslim, but an agent of the non-Muslims.” (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

### **The influence of foreign powers**

Few people in the world treasure their independence more or have defended it more fiercely than the Afghans. An accident of geography has placed Afghanistan at one of the world’s most strategic crossroads – and Afghans have spent the better part of the past seven centuries repelling foreign invaders. For some, the purpose was to secure critical routes through Asia, for others, it was to exploit natural resources. Still others came to make sure that no other country would dominate the region. It is no wonder, then, that Afghans have long viewed war through a lens of deep suspicion of the outside world.

This point of view has lost none of its potency in the past 20 years. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a repetition of history, this time accompanied by an army approaching 120,000 men and weapons that could destroy an entire village within an hour.<sup>6</sup> Efforts by the United States and others to arm the *mujahideen*, though viewed in an entirely different light, added more evidence of the influence of foreign powers. And when the Cold War ended and the superpowers left Afghanistan to the Afghans, both rumours of — and the reality of — foreign influence continued.

This acute suspicion towards the actions of foreign powers in Afghanistan is shared by combatants and civilians alike, as the ICRC consultation reveals. In the focus groups, refugees, medical doctors and fighters of all stripes painted a stark picture of a country subject to the plots of outsiders bent on destroying the Afghans’ way of life and beliefs.

All external powers are behind this evil. They want to finish Islam here in Afghanistan. They want a non-Muslim government. (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)<sup>7</sup>

Afghans are brave and strong people. All neighbourhoods are fearing them. Therefore their annihilation has been planned under a conspiracy. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

Brother is fighting with brother. Foreign hands are behind all this... Had there not been any foreign element in Afghanistan, there would not be any war. (FG, refugee women, Peshawar)

Externals are controlling Afghan groups. They are playing in[to] externals’ hands and fighting with each other. Externals have their own aims. They are using Afghans to achieve their aims. (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul)

...the Afghans valiantly fought against the invading Russians and their only aim was to oust the aliens [from] their land. And the ongoing war is also because of external involvement in our affairs. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

<sup>6</sup> Brogan, Patrick, *World Conflicts*, Scarecrow Press, 1998, p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> Three of the nine focus groups and two of the 20 in-depth interviews were conducted in Peshawar, Pakistan, a centre of Afghan refugee camps and headquarters for the leaders of many Afghan factions.

This war was not between good and bad... It is just like chess. Externals are using us and making us fight with each other. (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul)

Afghans are not the only people surveyed in the People on War project to voice such suspicions and fears, but history has perhaps given them the most valid claim to such strong views. As will be seen, however, their belief in the extraordinary power of foreign countries to shape events in Afghanistan is doubled-edged.

### **The failure of Afghan leaders**

War today in Afghanistan is confined primarily to battles between the Taliban and Northern Coalition fighters in the country's north. Nevertheless, many civilians and fighters – as the quotes above illustrate – cling to their belief that outside powers continue to manipulate events. But the ICRC consultation demonstrates that a new dimension has emerged that is helping to define attitudes towards war among Afghans: a growing anger at those who continue to fight.

Focus groups and in-depth interviews revealed increasing frustration and exasperation among Afghan civilians as they narrated the course of events in their country.

The Russians were defeated and thrown out of our country. After that the Afghan people, part of the same nation, are fighting amongst each other. Whosoever is stronger starts fighting. This war is useless. (IDI, traffic policeman, Kabul)

Initially, Najeeb and [the] *mujahideen* were fighting against each other. Then Gulbadeen Masood and Rubbani jumped in the war. There is also a war between Persian-speaking and Pushto-speaking people. Now Taliban have started the war. They are all against each other. (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)<sup>8</sup>

Persian-speaking [people] are fighting with Pushto-speaking, and Azbak are fighting with Hazara. They are all citizens of Afghanistan, so why do they fight with each other? (FG, refugee women, Peshawar)<sup>9</sup>

All of them are Muslims. Why do they use such weapon[s] which can destroy their houses, their nation? (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

In focus groups, fighters also voiced frustration with the course of battle. Combatants on all sides said that the internecine warfare amongst Afghans has wrought more damage than the Soviets inflicted on their country. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar; FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad) Fighters of the ruling Taliban draw a strict line between the *jihad* (holy war) that was waged against the Soviet Union and the "futile sectarian killing" that has followed; "Internal fighting is [a] curse and should be avoided." (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad) One Northern Coalition fighter echoed this sentiment, distinguishing the *jihad* against the Soviet Union and the "last six or seven years we can call it war which is very destructive for Afghans. This is war, we don't want war."

<sup>8</sup> The complexity of post-Soviet wars is well illustrated here. The reference to Najeeb is to Muhammad Najibullah, the former head of the Afghan secret police who was installed in 1986 as President of Afghanistan with the support of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Gulbadeen refers to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Pushtun fundamentalist and *mujahid* leader who served as Prime Minister after Najibullah was removed from power in 1992. Masood is Ahmad Shah Mas'ud, the Tajik *mujahid* leader who competed with Hekmatyar for outside support and weapons. Rubbani refers to Burhanuddin Rabbani, another Tajik *mujahid* leader who became President in June 1992. Rabbani and Mas'ud's factions fought a civil war with Hekmatyar until 1995. Pushto is the language of Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, the Pushtuns, who are estimated to make up between 40 and 50 per cent of the population. Persian – or Dari – is spoken by Tajiks, Afghanistan's second largest ethnic group, whose people live mostly in northern, north-eastern and western Afghanistan. See Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid*, op cit.

<sup>9</sup> Azbak appears to be a reference to the Uzbek people, who number about one million in Afghanistan. About one million Afghans also belong to the Hazara ethnic group, which primarily occupies central Afghanistan. See Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid*, pp. 16-17.

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Continued fighting has generated a deepening suspicion among Afghan civilians of the motives of today's fighters. They are moving towards a view that "Afghans destroyed the country with their own hands". (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul) More than a decade after the last Soviet soldier left their land, Afghans are looking inwards in an attempt to understand what has happened to their society – and to affix blame to those they hold responsible.

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## The war experience

Two decades of war in Afghanistan have left the country devastated, its population depleted, and the survivors physically and mentally exhausted. The numbers are devastating: 1.7 million dead, 2 million injured or maimed, 5 million driven from their homes.<sup>10</sup> It is only when the voices of the victims are heard that the true extent of the horror and damage to the country, and particularly among the younger generation, becomes clear. "We all have the same story," as one refugee woman put it, "[The] story of losses." (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

### Total war

War has swept across Afghanistan like wildfire, leaving broken lives and barren landscapes in its trail. In focus groups and in-depth interviews, participants painted a picture of a conflict without end, warfare that has physically erased many of their country's natural resources, reduced to rubble the monuments of its proud history and forever scarred its people.

This ongoing war has done irreparable damage to the land and Afghan nation. Its gifts were many for almost all the Afghan families in the shape of deaths and wounded. It has affected the people both mentally and economically and still these people fear that for how long this war would go on... In short, the Afghan war has affected every sphere of life. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

During this war our houses were destroyed, farms became barren and our fruit gardens no longer grow anything. We are faced with hunger and starvation. At times we had to eat grass... At the moment there is peace in... some places, but most of Afghanistan is still in war. Though safe from bullets, we are head to toe in poverty and misery. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

In the beginning our war was against Russians. At that time I was young, full of passions. I wrote a lot in [our] nation's defence. But this war [has been] prolonged. Now after 20 years my conclusion is that war is nothing but war. (IDI, journalist, Peshawar)

For any country a 20-year war is too much. It has [not] left anything of the nation nor of the people. (IDI, shopkeeper, Kabul)

I got widow[ed], so many women got widow[ed]. Children got orphan[ed] and uneducated. Our country has been destroyed. People left their places. Is it good? No. Not at all. Innocent people are killed in war. It is wrong, one hundred per cent wrong. (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

In the focus groups and in-depth interviews, Afghans across a broad social spectrum chose literally the same words to define war.

...it was nothing but destruction. (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

War, simply, is destruction. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

...just destruction and disaster. (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad)

War is nothing but destruction. (IDI, shopkeeper, Kabul)

<sup>10</sup> Brogan, Patrick, *World Conflicts*, Scarecrow Press, 1998, p. 123.

Nothing but restlessness and destruction. (IDI, displaced woman, Peshawar)

It is all destruction... (IDI, traffic policeman, Kabul)

We have seen nothing but destruction. (IDI, journalist, Peshawar)

War is nothing but destruction. (IDI, Northern Coalition fighter, Charikar)

War itself is a great disaster, great destruction. (IDI, scholar, Charikar)

War is nothing but destruction. (IDI, artist, Charikar)

### **Chaos and brutality**

No matter which of the four phases of war Afghans experienced most directly, this was a war that seemed to erupt suddenly and throw people's lives into disarray. The stories of two refugee women are illustrative:

The war started at four in the morning. Rockets were fired all around. We all came out of our homes. It was winter. Some of us were without shoes and some without veils. We picked [up] our children and left our houses. We were afraid we might be hit by a rocket. We walked for three days and reached Jalalabad [city in eastern Afghanistan]. Our country became barren. (FG, refugee women, Peshawar)

One morning we were going out for shopping. We were in a rickshaw. People were getting ready for their Friday prayers. They were bathing or wearing clean clothes. When we returned from market they were having tea. All of a sudden some soldiers came and said that [they] wanted to talk [to] the men. They were *mujahideen*. They gathered all males including young and old. They asked them to make a line and then started firing on them and killed them. Children came out crying. They killed my uncle, they killed my brother, they killed my grandfather. Then police came. They entered... our houses. They were searching for money, jewellery and tape recorders. They didn't say anything to females. They asked them not to cry... We were in great pain when we left Afghanistan. (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

For many Afghans, as one farmer said, "war is the name of panic and chaos and killing and injuring. It is the name of problems and troubles, nothing else." (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

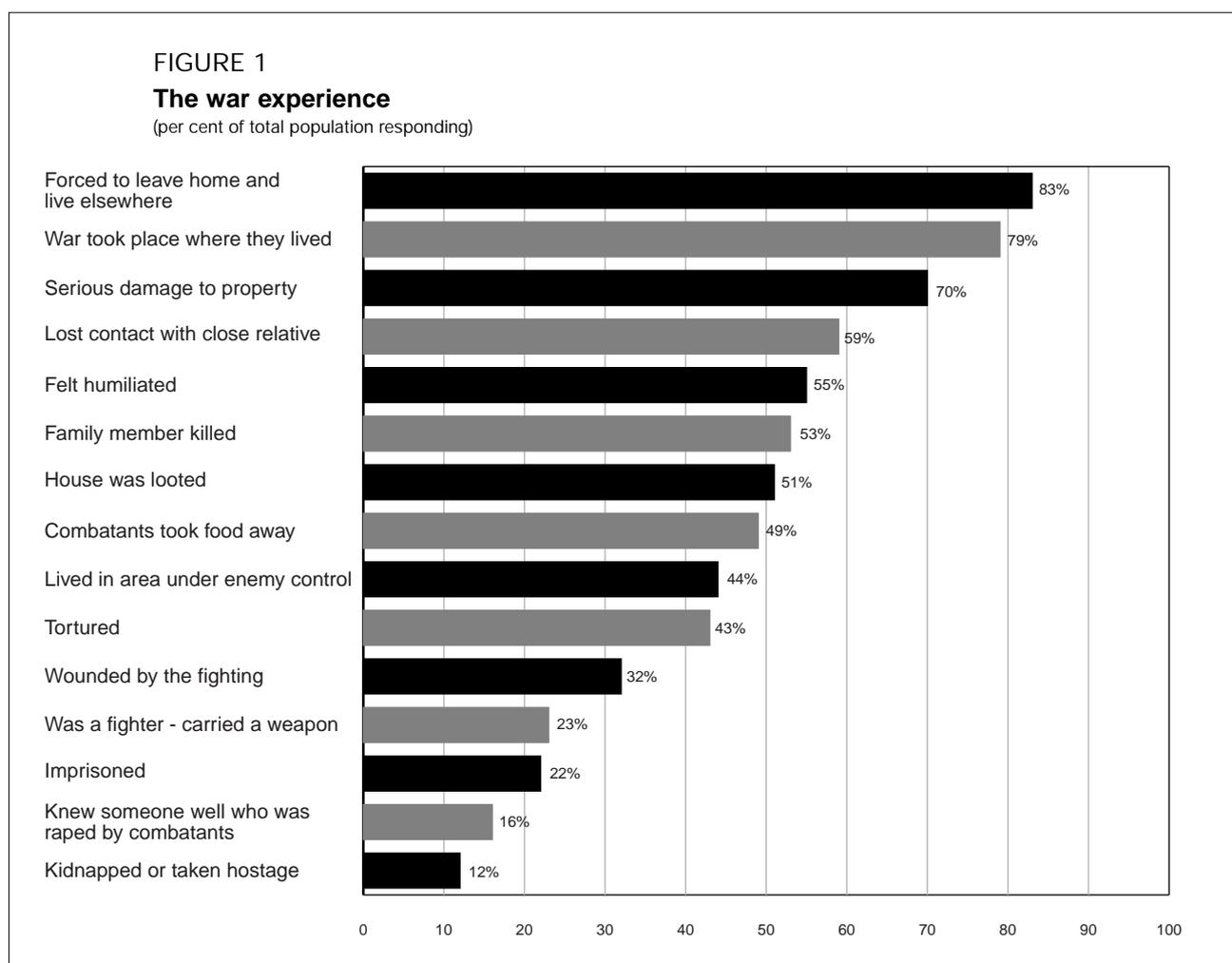
Eighty-four per cent of respondents say that when they think about "the biggest problems in their personal life", they think about problems related to war.<sup>11</sup> In all the focus groups and in-depth interviews, which involved more than 80 people, only one participant could find something good to say about the war: "...being homeless we had to go to many cities and got acquainted with many people, and found out how nice were Afghan people. The people who are suffering hardships of life and are poor. We found out were very hospitable. We were treated very well wherever we went." (IDI, NGO worker, Kabul) But when survey respondents are asked what they learned from the war that others should know, 64 per cent say war is worthless.

Images of horror punctuate people's memories. In focus groups, while men generally shied away from mentioning specific incidents, women came forward with a virtual catalogue of barbarity: one told of combatants who amputated the breasts of people; another of being forced to abandon her son's

<sup>11</sup> Because this question was asked during a survey about the impact of war in Afghanistan, it is likely that the findings are somewhat inflated. Comparative data from other countries studied in the People on War project does not exist because this question, and a similar question regarding "the biggest problems in Afghanistan", were only asked in the Afghan consultation.

bullet-ridden body, not knowing if it had been “eaten by dogs or by cats”; a medical doctor spoke of a rocket attack that instantly killed eight members of a family, leaving only an infant who “was saved by a miracle”; a male farmer spoke of having to bury the body of a woman who had been cut into five pieces. (FG, refugee women, Peshawar; FG, female medical doctors, Kabul; FG, farmers, Jalalabad) Then there were countless stories of living testaments to the cruelty of technology, tens of thousands of Afghans maimed by landmines or grenades made to resemble children’s toys.

The war took a terrible toll. More than half of respondents (53 per cent) report that a member of their immediate family was killed during the conflict. Although polygamy – which is widely practised in Afghanistan – may have inflated this figure, the psychological impact of the feeling of loss and the desire for revenge engendered cannot be underestimated.<sup>12</sup> In focus groups, participants spoke routinely of losing their loved ones; one woman reported 12 family members killed in the war, while another referred to her sister, whose five daughters were all widowed by war. (FG, housewives, Faizabad) Fifty-nine per cent of respondents report losing contact with a close relative, and 16 per cent report knowing someone who was raped. (See Figure 1.)

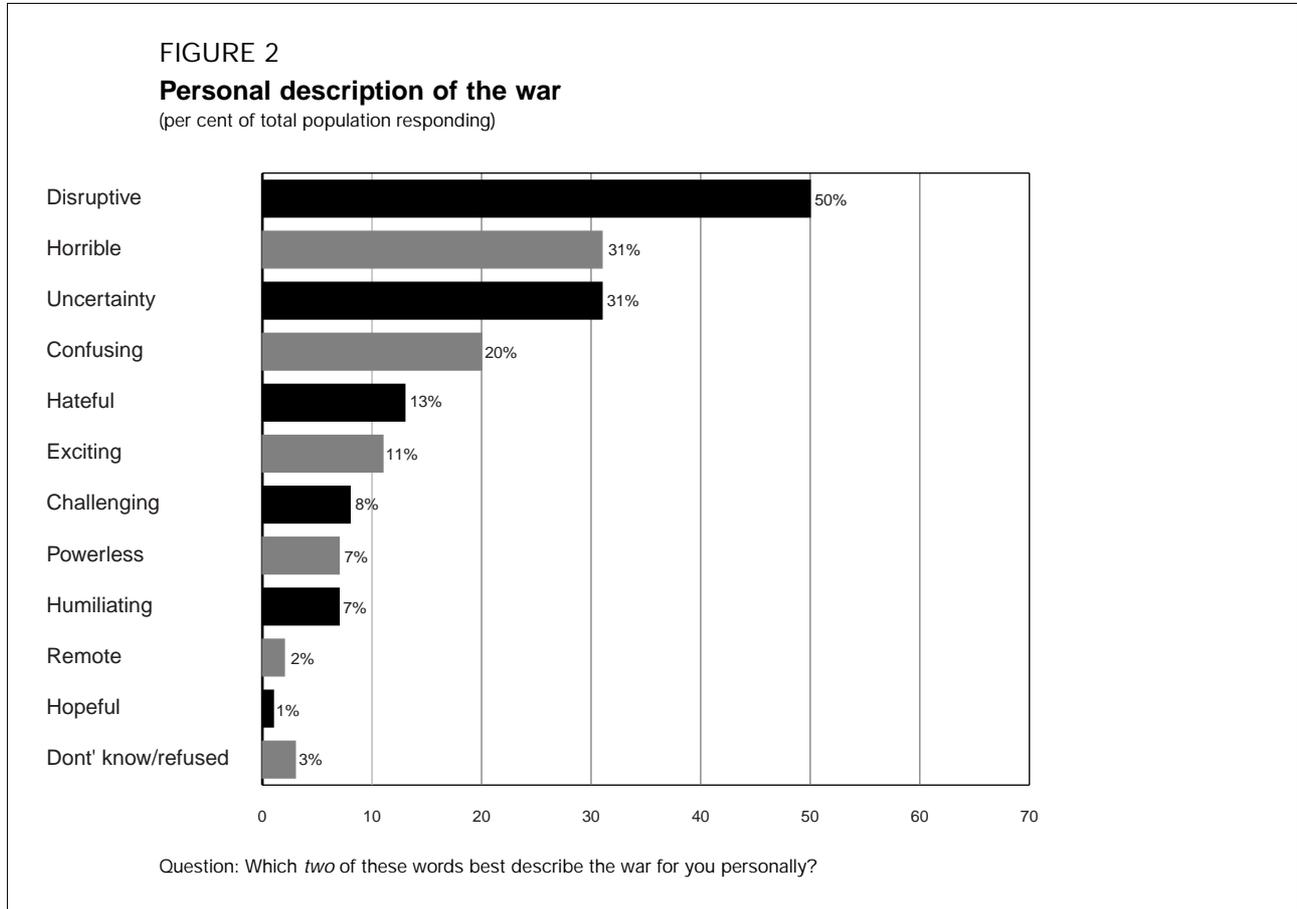


Almost one in four Afghans (23 per cent) report participating in the war as combatants, but the conflict’s impact spread far beyond those who carried weapons.<sup>13</sup> There were few places to hide. Seventy-nine per cent of respondents say they lived in an area where fighting occurred. Forty-four per cent of Afghans, moreover, report that they lived in an area that came under enemy control.

<sup>12</sup> Afghans have a broad definition of “immediate family”, one that includes, for example, the children born to the husband’s other wives.

<sup>13</sup> This figure includes 50 additional combatants who have been weighted to the observed percentage of combatants in the base sample. The combatant category is self-reported, that is, respondents determined themselves whether they qualified as “combatants”.

A remarkable 83 per cent of Afghan respondents say that the war forced them to leave their homes. Perhaps more so than any other conflict in the years since the Second World War, Afghanistan's war is the story of people driven from their homes – a tale of millions forced to seek refuge elsewhere in their country or mainly in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran.<sup>14</sup> Little wonder, then, that when respondents are asked to choose from among a list of adjectives that describe the war, the words “disruptive” (50 per cent), “uncertainty” (31 per cent) and “confusing” (20 per cent) are selected most often.<sup>15</sup> (See Figure 2.)



Those who carried weapons into war, naturally, bore a disproportionate share of the conflict's impact: presented with a list of 12 negative consequences of war – ranging from imprisonment to humiliation to property damage – nine in ten combatants say they experienced four or more of these. But fully seven in ten civilians offer the same answer.

Significant numbers of non-combatants, moreover, experienced the harshest of these consequences. Twenty-nine per cent of non-combatants report being wounded, 38 per cent say they were tortured, and almost one in five (18 per cent) say they were imprisoned. (This compares with 46 per cent, 59 per cent and 35 per cent of combatants, respectively.) In addition, 68 per cent of non-combatants say they experienced serious property damage during the war.

That the people of Afghanistan have survived the devastation and destruction of the past 20 years is a testament to their inner strength. In the focus groups, however, Afghans from all levels of society – whether combatant or civilian – did not hesitate to note the war's tremendous impact on individual and collective mental health.

...this 20-year-old war has left 90 per cent [of] inhabitants mentally and psychologically ill. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

<sup>14</sup> An estimated 1.2 million Afghans sought refuge in Pakistan, 1.4 million in Iran. Brogan, *World Conflicts*, p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> About three in ten (31 per cent) choose the word “horrible”, while 13 per cent choose “hateful”.

...this war has made 90 per cent [of] Afghans psychological patients. By the Grace of Allah I am well off and have vehicles and servants. But I too am a psychological patient and take medicines. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

Most of the people have been caught by different mental disturbances, spiritual illnesses... People are in spiritual illness. They are unable to recover from that. (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad)

[The war] has spiritually affected the people. People are having nervous breakdowns. They have become [mental] patients. (IDI, traffic policeman, Kabul)

...a long line of people are suffering mental and psychological illnesses... I don't know any of them who are not suffering from some kind of psychological problems. If you go to a doctor... beside other physical illnesses, they may tell you that you also have some psychological problems. It is all due to war. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

This concern — and public discussion of a taboo subject — is particularly striking in a country isolated from the world of modern medicine and coming from a people who pride themselves on their indomitable character and who turn to *mullahs*, not doctors, for guidance in matters of the mind and spirit.

### **Women's roles and reality**

Although few Afghan women have carried weapons into battle – 8 per cent versus 37 per cent of men – 20 years of war have left many subjected to an unusual kind of pain. Wives have had to cope with husbands and fathers leaving their families to take up arms, invariably for months at a time, sometimes for years. Mothers have watched as their teenage sons have been forcibly taken away to combat. And for literally millions of Afghan women, war has meant a forced march to survival as refugees in foreign lands. Cut off from their homes and solely responsible for the care of their children, they have endured an extraordinary burden.

At the same time, Afghan women inside and outside the country's borders remain in their traditional role. In focus groups, the sympathies that Afghan men expressed for the suffering of women are obscured by their traditional view of women's role in an Islamic society.

I think mostly women suffered, as they are the weaker sex. The Prophet, too, has said that women are weak... In this regard the *Quran* has declared that "Man is superior over woman". As women are weak and can't resist, hence [they] are more prone to the effects of war. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

...most of the time men go to the mountains, it is very easy for them to escape, whereas women remain at home and they come under attack. Women are very weak beings. If her son is killed, she is a suffering mother; if [her] husband is killed again she is suffering. Men are more free to help themselves and fight and things like that but women [in] this regard are poor, helpless people. (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad)

Women are greatly affected, as they are the weaker sex and have little forbearance. I mean they don't have much courage to face killing and injuring scenes. Second, Allah has created women for love and peace, so they are most affected by the effects of war. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

Women need more kindness and protection because they are inferior [to] the men. They are inferior in many respects, physically, even the brain. Their thinking power is less than men. They need protection and kindness from the men who are superior and stronger. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

The consultation offers hints that Afghan women are much tougher than the men think. A focus group with housewives who live in northern Afghanistan gave a glimpse into their attitudes. Asked what they would do if combatants “exceeded limits in war”, two women answered:

We had weapons in our hands. We would have martyred ourselves if they had ever exceeded the limits. At that time we were strong and powerful, now we are old.

We had Kalashnikovs [Soviet rifles] with us. We protected our young daughters.

(FG, housewives, Faizabad)

Survey results reveal a counterintuitive trend: that Afghan women are more willing than men to accept attacks on both civilian communities and combatants. Although the gap between men and women does not hold across all categories, the results are striking.

- Nineteen per cent of Afghan women — but only 7 per cent of men — say they think that captured enemy combatants sometimes deserve to die.
- One in four women (25 per cent) say that if one side in a war is killing captured combatants, they would approve of the other side doing the same. Only 14 per cent of men agree.
- Nearly four in ten Afghan women (39 per cent) say they would not help or save the life of a wounded or surrendering enemy combatant who had killed someone close to them. Only 25 per cent of men agree.
- Thirty-nine per cent of women — versus 26 per cent of men — say that captured combatants can be subjected to torture.
- Fifty-seven per cent of Afghan women say that combatants should leave civilians alone during wartime, compared with 68 per cent of men. On this question, women over 40 years old take a particularly hard line; 46 per cent of this group say civilians should be avoided altogether during combat, compared with 63 per cent of women under 40 years old and 68 per cent of all men.

Explaining these results is not easy. In Afghanistan, there is no doubt that women suffered terribly; three in ten report that they were wounded during the fighting and more than one-third (36 per cent) say they were tortured.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps because so few Afghan women actually took up arms or were imprisoned and millions more left the country as refugees, they were and are more likely to be removed from the immediate experiences of war.<sup>17</sup> Their experiences – deaths in the family, forced removal of children and destruction of their homes – seem to have made them both more realistic about war and less forgiving of those who participate.

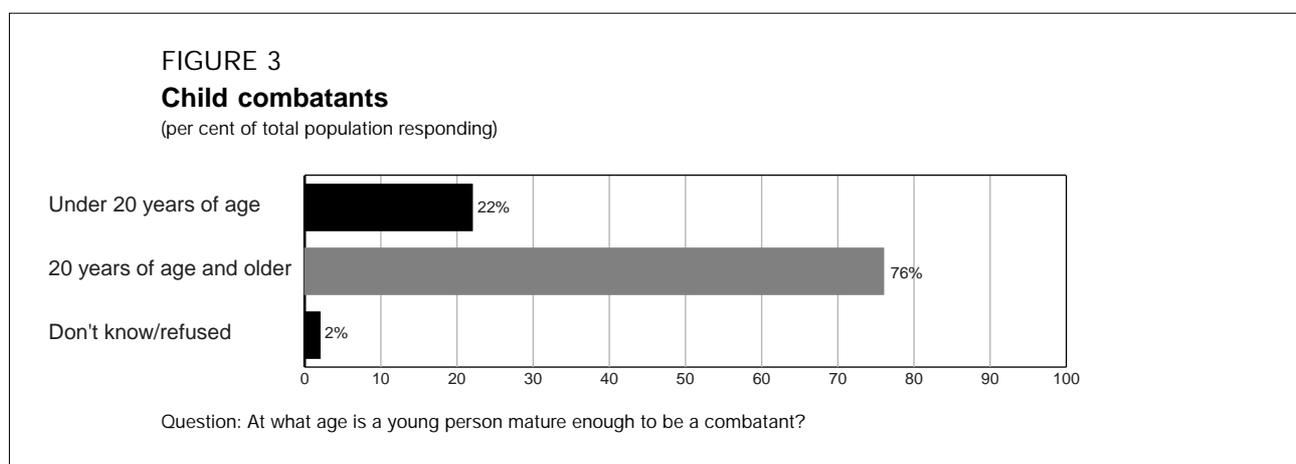
<sup>16</sup> Thirty-five per cent of men say they were wounded and fully one-half say they were tortured. While torture is generally associated with imprisonment, in Afghanistan it seems to be more broadly defined.

<sup>17</sup> Thirty-seven per cent of men were combatants during the war, compared with 8 per cent of women. Thirty-four per cent of male respondents say they were imprisoned, compared with only 9 per cent of women. Twenty per cent of women say they supported a side during the war, compared with 53 per cent of men.

### A generation lost to war

Perhaps nothing in the 20-year war distresses Afghans more than its impact on their young people. It is no exaggeration to say that an entire generation of Afghans has known nothing but war. In the ICRC consultation, participants express remorse at the role young teenagers have played as combatants in the war. They grieve over the destruction of Afghanistan's schools and believe they have cheated their youth of the all-important education they deserve. And they voice deep concern about the culture of violence that surrounds their children.

In the survey, there is overwhelming support – 76 per cent among all Afghans and 67 per cent among combatants – for the idea that no Afghan should be allowed to enter combat before the age of 20. (See Figure 3.) In focus groups, fighters volunteer evidence to support this belief, citing Islamic tenets or quoting commanders who say a “beard is compulsory” before a man can join the battle. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad) Religious teachers echo these opinions, suggesting that no one should go to war before the age of 25, the age “when people start knowing about good and bad”. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)



Yet the phenomenon of child combatants – teenagers, to be exact – has been a feature of the Afghan war from the moment it began. In the war against the Soviet Union, teenagers were recruited with promises of glory for their role in the *jihad*. As the war continued, and many potential combatants fled across the border to safety, mass unemployment made young men easy prey for combatants who offered to buy their services. Those who resisted – some as young as 14 – were volunteered for duty, taken away from their mothers at gunpoint if necessary. In the case of Afghanistan, there are few subjects that better illustrate the divide between the harsh reality of war and the stated beliefs of the combatants than that of child combatants.

In discussing the war's impact on their children, Afghans focus on the destruction of the country's schools and the loss of the educational opportunities that offer young people a path towards a proper Islamic life. When asked how the war has affected the Afghan people, participants in focus groups and in-depth interviews turned first not to lives lost, families torn apart or homes destroyed, but to the loss of education and literacy:

[Moderator: Afghanistan has been in war for almost 20 years. How has this affected the people of Afghanistan?]

Most of our young ones have remained uneducated and illiterate during war, they are very backward. All the schools and universities are closed. This is a great loss due to war. (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad)

[Moderator: What are the effects of these 20 years of war on the Afghan people?]

Very negative effects. Afghan people are now lagging behind in education. Schools are ruined. Young people are handicapped. Many of them martyred. (IDI, Northern Coalition fighter, Charikar)

...the great destruction which the war brings with it is the sector of education. During the war period, [the] education system is disrupted. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

[Moderator: So what is your biggest [fear] for the future?]

I think the biggest for me is illiteracy. We lose our way, what to do? As I said, sometimes we don't know if we are human being[s]. (FG, housewives, Faizabad)

[Moderator: What are the effects of this 20-year war on the Afghan people?]

There is no education, no training in [our] country... All leaders should get together to seek peace in [the] nation. So that young people can get education again. These people have seen nothing except war. (IDI, artist, Charikar)

Today the greatest repercussion this war has is that other countries of the world have given books to their coming generations, but we have given guns to our youth. This, in my opinion, has taken us 100 years back. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

In focus groups and in-depth interviews, participants expressed both exasperation and outrage at what one farmer called "the Kalashnikov culture" that has enveloped their children and threatens their future. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad) They speak of young men who, in the absence of education and a good example from adults, have become addicted to drugs or turned to crime. Young fighters talk about dreams destroyed:

I was born during the war, so instead of enjoying the childhood and going to schools [for religious lessons], I had to be an expert in using the lethal weapons. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

I was getting [an] education and was very intelligent. I had a desire to become a doctor. But due to war instead of *masiha* [doctor] I became a snake of war. This thing very much mentally disturbs me and that desire of becoming a doctor is still close to my heart. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

A generation has lost its opportunity to learn – and in turn, its hopes for the future. The experiences and observations of one group of religious teachers illustrate well how far Afghans must travel before they can escape the impact of so many years of war.

[I] saw some boys fighting among themselves and got them separated but then one of the young boys told [me], "Thank you very much, but you elder people, older ones, are fighting among yourselves. So if you are fighting, we also learn from you. That is why young people fight among themselves."

One class was asked to make a drawing of their choice and this was a class of 55 boys, and 45 of them made either a gun, a tank, or some other weapon in their drawing. Only the remaining ten made a flower or something else. So you can imagine how much impact fighting has on their minds.

...young people have only seen and heard about war in Afghanistan. How can they think about something else when this is all they have seen and heard, fighting and fighting and fighting? (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

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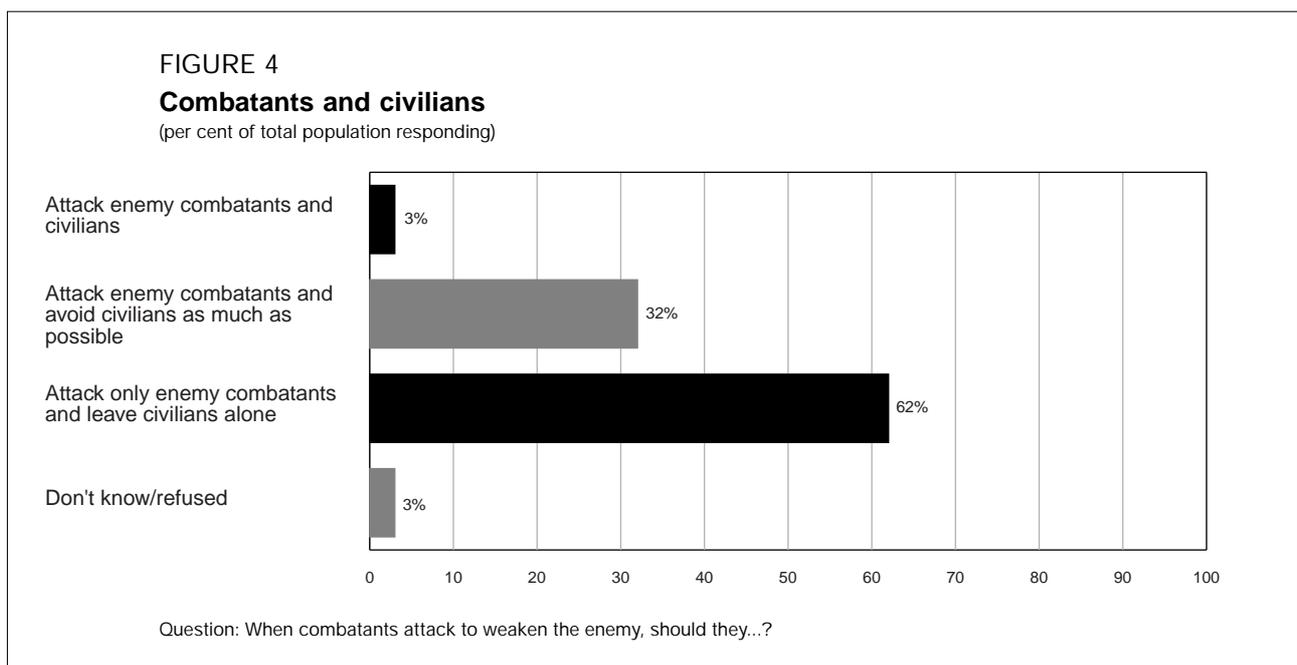
## Limits in war

Devastated by their experience of total war and heavily influenced by the teachings of Islam, the people of Afghanistan display a realistic ambivalence towards the protection of civilians during wartime. For a majority, the suffering they have endured and the traditional tenets of Islam have combined to produce clear-cut feelings that civilians ought to be protected.

Yet, those very same elements have opened the door to acceptance of abuses against civilians during war. Although Afghans cling tightly to their conviction that non-combatants should be left alone – particularly when presented with potentially deadly situations – a significant minority have learned from firsthand experience that avoiding war is not an option for most civilians. The same combatants who recite religious prohibitions against involving civilians in war, can find in Islam clear justification for their attacks against enemies who oppose their goals – attacks that almost inevitably put civilian lives and property at risk.

### Protection of civilians

When it comes to protecting civilians during wartime, the conflict between the ideal and the real produces ambivalent convictions and beliefs among Afghans. Almost two-thirds of Afghan respondents (62 per cent) say that combatants should attack only enemy combatants and leave civilians alone, and only 3 per cent say that both combatants and civilians are fair game. At the same time, fully one-third of respondents adopt the more pragmatic attitude that combatants who are trying to weaken the enemy should “avoid civilians as much as possible”. (See Figure 4.)



In focus groups and in-depth interviews, both fighters and civilians stated flatly that attacks on civilians should be prohibited and war should be confined to battlefields.

Only the people who are your target, your particular enemy, they are the people who should be targeted in the course of war. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

War should be restricted to fighters. Those who are not involved in it should not be attacked or killed or harmed. (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul)

The fighters should fight the fighters, the innocent and defenceless people should be spared. (IDI, shopkeeper, Kabul)

The warring factions are required to keep the fighting to the field. Children, women and the elderly people should be kept in peace. Public places like schools and hospitals should not be targeted. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

If the fighters want to fight they should go to the valleys [and] mountains and fight with each other there so that we are not harmed and affected. (FG, housewives, Faizabad)

...there is a law in the nation... according to that "the one who has no concern with the war should be spared from the miseries of war". (IDI, NGO worker, Mazar-I-Sharif)

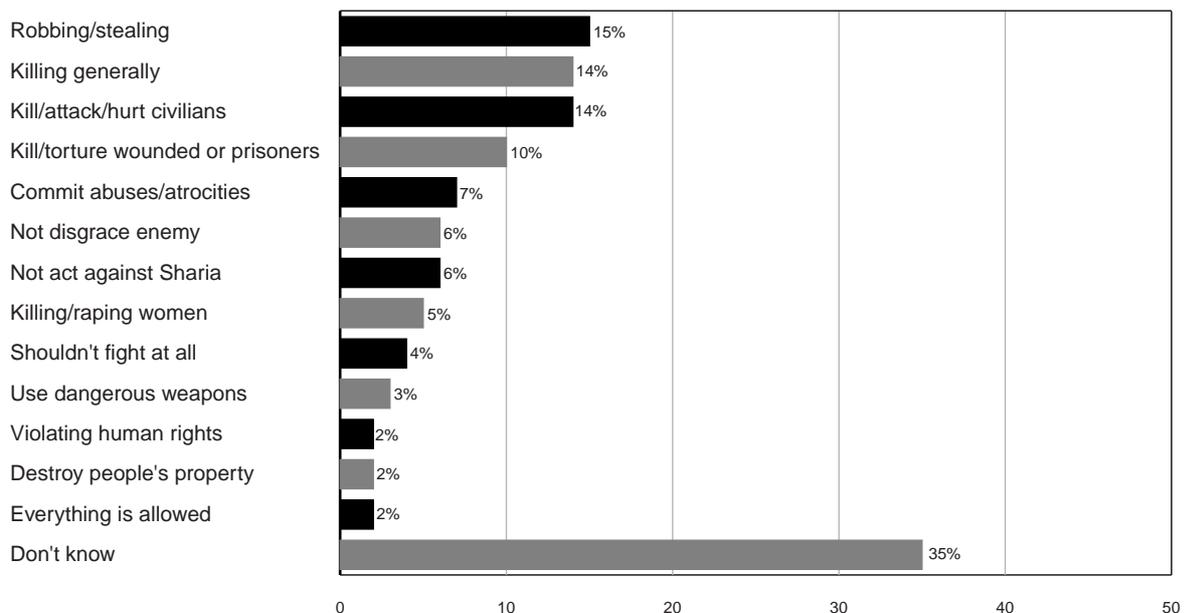
When survey respondents are asked *why* they believe combatants attack civilians, fully 55 per cent ignore the question and reiterate that combatants "must not attack civilians".

A majority of Afghan respondents also believe that there are specific actions which should be prohibited during wartime. Asked if there is anything that combatants should not be allowed to do in fighting their enemy, they volunteer a long list of potential abuses, including robbing and stealing, attacks on civilians, torturing prisoners, violating the *Sharia* and raping women. Only 2 per cent volunteer that "everything is allowed" during wartime. More than one-third (35 per cent) could not or would not name any specific actions. (See Figure 5.)

FIGURE 5

**What combatants should not do**

(per cent of total population responding) (open-ended question)

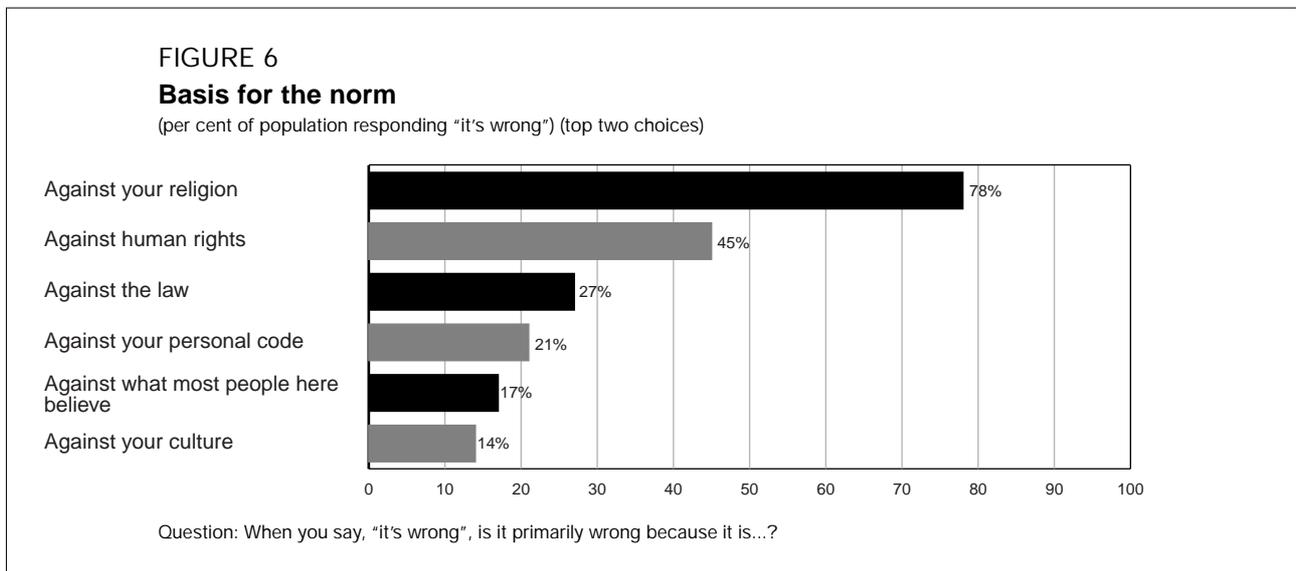


Question: Is there anything that combatants should not be allowed to do in fighting the enemy?

When respondents are asked why such behaviour should not be allowed, almost three-quarters (74 per cent) offer a normative answer, saying that it is “wrong”. Among a people who have been forced to move by the millions and whose country has been physically devastated, only 22 per cent opt for the more pragmatic explanation that “it just causes too many problems”.<sup>18</sup>

Of the respondents who say that certain actions are wrong, more than three-quarters (78 per cent) cite religious beliefs as the basis for their convictions. Forty-five per cent of Afghans refer to human rights, nearly one-third (31 per cent) cite local beliefs and culture, and about one in four respondents mention violations of law or their “personal code” (27 and 21 per cent, respectively). (See Figure 6.) One religious teacher’s explanation offers a particularly revealing look at how Islam and other motivations mesh:

...[attacking civilians] is against every principle of humanity and also of Islam. We absolutely forbid them to do this in Islam. People who are not involved in war are not allowed to be killed in war. Even from a rational point of view and from a humanitarian point of view... you would come to the same conclusion: that people who are not involved in war should not be attacked in war. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)



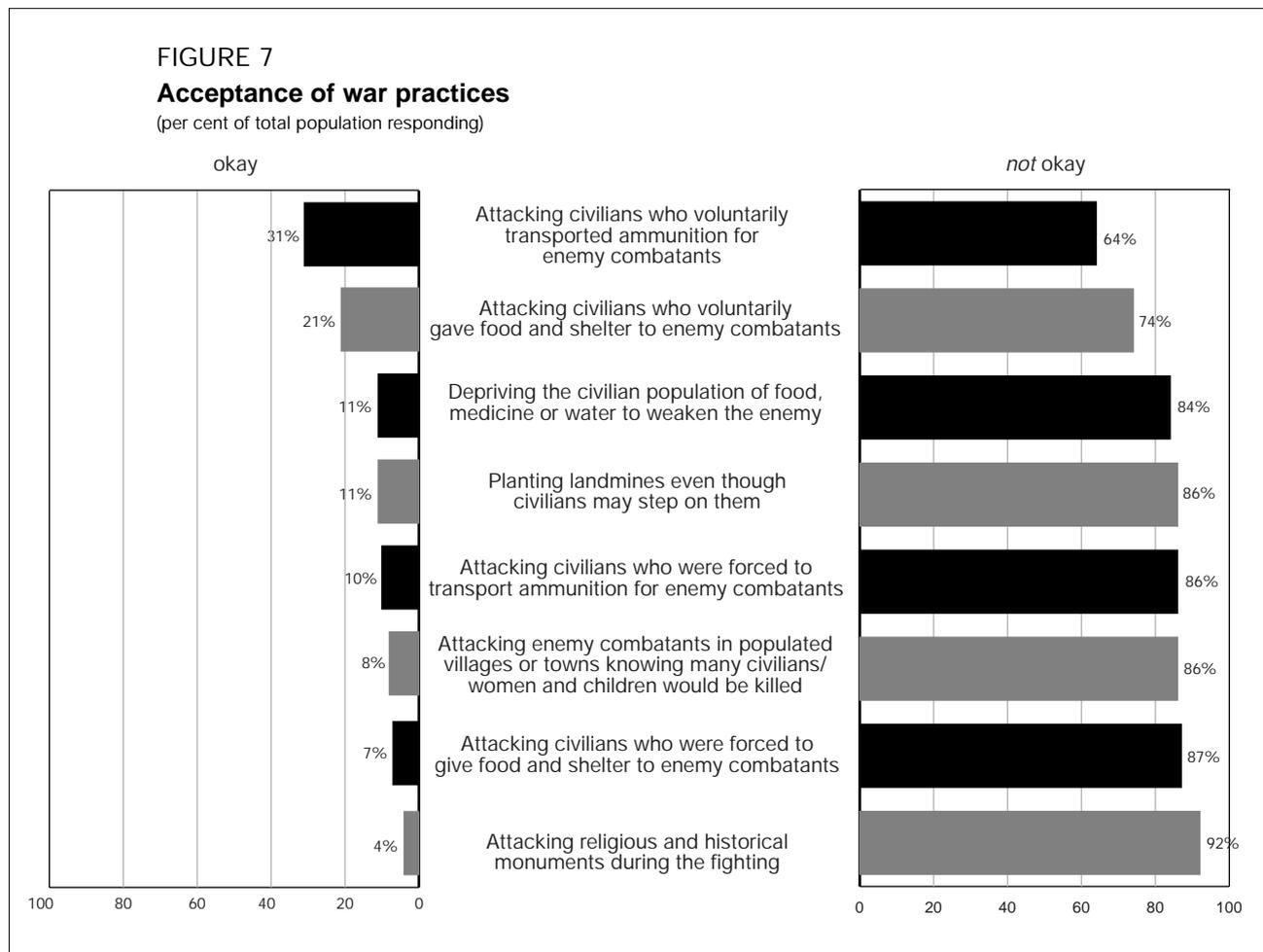
When Afghans are presented with specific scenarios involving actions that threaten civilian lives and property, they cast aside the pragmatism born of their experience and the better angels of their nature come forth, with about eight in ten respondents saying civilians should be protected.

- Eighty-one per cent reject attacks on civilians who provide food and shelter to the enemy.
- Seventy-five per cent reject attacks on civilians who transport ammunition for the enemy.
- Eighty-four per cent say depriving civilians of food, medicine or water in order to weaken the enemy is wrong. Only 11 per cent say it is “part of war”.
- Eighty-six per cent say that attacking the enemy in populated villages or towns knowing that many civilians would be killed is wrong. Only 8 per cent say it is “part of war”.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Among those offering a more pragmatic explanation, fully two-thirds say that war “produces too much hate and division”, slightly less than one-half (47 per cent) say it “produces too much destruction”, and almost equal numbers (25 and 22 per cent, respectively) say it causes “too much psychological damage” or “physical suffering”.

<sup>19</sup> When the question is asked using the phrase “women and children” instead of civilians, the percentage who believe it is wrong remains the same (86 per cent).

As Figure 7 demonstrates, respondents draw a distinction between civilians who are forced to support the enemy and those who do so voluntarily. Twenty-one per cent accept attacks on civilians who voluntarily provide food and shelter, while only 7 per cent accept attacks on those who help the enemy under duress. Three times as many respondents sanction attacks on civilians who voluntarily transport ammunition for the enemy as do those who are coerced (31 per cent, compared with 10 per cent).



In the focus groups and in-depth interviews, participants offered succinct explanations for these divided attitudes:

If they helped the fighters then they also took part in war. (IDI, traffic policeman, Kabul)

[A] person providing shelter and food to warriors is participating in war, so [attacking him] is right. (IDI, displaced woman, Peshawar)

Those who provide weapons to [fighters] or help them on a voluntary basis are actually participating in war. (IDI, journalist, Kabul)

...if the people of that area had given shelter to our opponents and are helping them against us, then we have no choice but to suspend food supply there. But if the case is different and most of the people of that area are either women, children and elderly, and are not helpful to the opposition, then we would never resort to such tactics. We condemn this. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

One might expect to find more tolerance of attacks on civilians among those who experienced the war firsthand, those who have taken sides in the conflict or those with a more pragmatic attitude towards war. But the survey reveals few differences. Among combatants and non-combatants, for example, a gap only appears when respondents are asked about civilians who transport ammunition.<sup>20</sup> Thirty per cent of combatants sanction attacks in such cases, compared with 17 per cent of non-combatants. There is almost total agreement in attitudes between combatants and non-combatants on depriving civilians of food, medicine or water. Fourteen per cent of combatants, compared with 11 per cent of non-combatants, would sanction this behaviour.

Similarly, 26 per cent of those who report taking sides in the war accept attacks on civilians who transport ammunition, while only 17 per cent of those who say they are non-partisan agree. Similar comparisons between those who say combatants should leave civilians alone during wartime and those who say combatants should "avoid civilians as much as possible" yield only negligible differences. Experience, partisanship and pragmatism, it seems, make Afghans no less committed to the protection of their fellow citizens.

### **The teachings of Islam**

At the heart of Afghan attitudes towards the protection of civilians during wartime lies a dilemma inherent in Islamic teachings. On the one hand, Islamic law and principles strictly forbid attacks against the innocent. On the other hand, the *Quran* and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad justify war – the *jihad* – against non-believers.

In the focus groups, both religious teachers and lay people uniformly cited Islamic teachings or historical examples that guide combatants not to attack civilians or defenceless people.

When Allah was in war with Jewish [people] he never mistreated the general public, women and children. He used to send prisoners back to their country. For this reason many Jewish [people] used to accept Islam and give it strength. (FG, refugee women, Peshawar)

...He [the Prophet] always told people not to interfere with old men, women and children. Those who are not actually in the trenches, they are not to be attacked. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

They [fighters] should follow the history of Islamic wars... Fighters should not kill aged people, children and women... In [the] past, before going to war an order was read to soldiers by leaders. The content of the order insisted that public would not be killed, women would not be insulted, looting was forbidden, trees would not be destroyed, etc. I think Islamic wars are the best examples for fighters and they should follow them. (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul)

Islam is against cruelty, cruelty against children, women and old people. Islam forbids the killing of innocent people and animals. It forbids the destruction of houses. All these things are against Islam. (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

...a parable which the Prophet told [about a] woman who was in hell because she did not give proper food to her cow when she was looking after [it]. And one man was saved from hell because of giving a dog some water... you have to observe the rights of every single living thing in Islam... Islamic law teaches us to observe

<sup>20</sup> A gap is also evident when respondents are asked about the deployment of landmines. See the section on Limits on weapons, p. 19.

people's rights and not to commit atrocities against certain segments of the population.... (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

There is a verse in the *Quran* that anyone who kills somebody else without a good, justifiable reason, or for the sake of spreading corruption in the land, it is as if he killed the whole of humankind... But still people do it. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

...when these principles of not attacking civilians are trod under foot, then the whole country is destroyed. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

Yet standing against all these teachings is the extraordinarily powerful concept of the *jihad*, the righteous war. In all the focus group discussions and interviews, not a single person challenged the belief in the holy war – nor its implications for civilians who might not be Muslims.

Participants did not hesitate to identify Islamic teachings that allow, indeed encourage, war staged according to the proper rules and against the right enemy. Nor did they seem fully cognizant of contradictory statements they made during the discussions:

Islam allows armed fighting. For example in wars if the opponent got unarmed by some reason, Muslims used to stop [the] attack until the opponent got [a] weapon again. A person not [involved] in war, whether old, young or child, shouldn't [be] kill[ed] with weapons. War should be restricted to fighters. Those who are not involved in it should not be attacked or killed or harmed. (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul)

...Afghans are not aggressive people. Islam does not allow us to slay non-believers. There are a lot of Hindus, a lot of [inaudible] in Afghanistan and they [are] absolutely living in peace... and in security. We are responsible for them, whoever they are. Even if a Muslim kills one of those people, that Muslim should be killed himself. But the only non-believer you are allowed to kill is the one who is attacking you. So if a non-believer has attacked you, then you are forced to fight against him in self-defence. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

The importance of this dilemma to Afghanistan's ongoing war should not be underestimated. One religious teacher focused on the balancing act required by those who attempt to follow Islamic principles in the conduct of war: "...when we buy pressure cookers, there are some instructions about how to use this pressure cooker. If you don't use it the right way, then you can do harm to yourself. The *Quran* is like a book of instructions on how we should live our lives." (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

Spreading the influence of traditional Islamic principles and strictly enforcing the *Sharia* are at the centre of the Taliban's continuing campaign to win military victory throughout the country. It should be noted, however, that all combatants and partisans in Afghanistan's wars – and not just the Taliban and its supporters – emphasize the importance of religion to a far greater extent than non-combatants and non-partisan civilians.<sup>21</sup>

### **Limits on weapons**

Twenty years of war have left Afghans adamant in their opposition to the use of weapons that indiscriminately harm civilians. The Soviet invasion and subsequent civil wars have exposed them to a virtual catalogue of modern arms: surface-to-air missiles, heavy bombs, tanks, helicopter gunships, napalm and landmines. These experiences have led them to the conclusion that "warriors should not use

<sup>21</sup> For example, combatants are twice as likely as non-combatants (61 to 31 per cent) to say that there are religious laws so important that those who violate them should be punished. Ninety per cent of people who say they support a side in the war identify religion as one of the primary reasons they believe attacks on civilians are wrong, compared with 71 per cent of those who have not taken sides.

such weapons against [the] general public which can destroy their lives or houses or can throw them in the mouth of death." (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

Afghans' firsthand experience with – and rejection of – modern weaponry is revealed when survey respondents are asked to name weapons that should never be used in war. Almost one in five (19 per cent) volunteer that *all* weapons should be banned. In focus groups and in-depth interviews, fighters and civilians alike demonstrated exhaustion and anger at the long-lasting impact these weapons have had on the Afghan people. A number of participants put the blame on foreign countries that have supplied weapons to Afghan factions. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad; FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar) Others have reached the point where they flatly reject any and all weapons.

We are not even in favour of small weapons. We don't want our country's destruction. We want peace and agreement. (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

Settlement is the weapon that if used no other weapon will [be] required. (IDI, religious leader, Charpark Laghman)

Specific weapons that Afghans reject include weapons of mass destruction – primarily nuclear and chemical – and those arms that have specifically plagued their country.<sup>22</sup> A near majority (46 per cent) say that landmines should not be used. In a country where an estimated 5-7 million mines have been planted,<sup>23</sup> only 11 per cent of respondents sanction their use to stop the enemy. Combatants are almost twice as likely as non-combatants to approve of the use of mines (16 per cent compared with 9 per cent). In the focus groups and in-depth interviews, however, fighters dismissed the use of landmines as a sign of "cowardliness" and are familiar with the international campaign to ban the use and production of mines. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad) Civilians described mines as "uncivilized" and "blind" and grieved over the tens of thousands who have been maimed. (IDI, displaced woman, Peshawar; IDI, journalist, Peshawar)

One in four respondents reject the use of napalm, the chemical agent which the Soviet Union employed during its war against the *mujahideen*. One in five volunteer that cluster bombs, rockets and missiles – all of which have been extensively used during the war – should never be used in battle. Many focus group and in-depth interview participants echoed the comments of a medical doctor that "the rocket is the worst weapon of war". (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul) The destructive power of rockets and bombs – weapons that "don't even respect the Holy Book" – is consistently mentioned by women, particularly those who have memories of abandoning their homes after sudden attacks. (FG, refugee women, Peshawar; FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar) Twenty-four per cent of women say that cluster bombs should never be used, compared with only 11 per cent of men.

In focus groups, participants displayed nostalgia for a code of warfare long past, in which combatants could see who the enemy was and know whom their weapons would harm.

I think nowadays war has become so brutal and so different that maybe we either have to think about this war and the wars [that] were fought in the past, in ancient history because now the [weapons] don't differentiate against civilians and they use... sophisticated arms that can kill a number of innocent people. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

The previous war was very good. One person would have been victorious, the other side was defeated. But [as] the technology goes forward, the worse war becomes. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

<sup>22</sup> Forty-five per cent of respondents say nuclear weapons should never be used, 36 per cent mention chemical weapons and 26 per cent mention laser weapons.

<sup>23</sup> UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, Afghanistan. *The Development of Indigenous Mine Action Capacities*, February 1998, p. 9.

They should use rifle[s] to fight each other... This will restrict the loss of lives.  
When they use other weapons, a lot of innocent people also become the  
victim[s]. (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

They should fight with their hands. (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad)

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## Captured combatants at risk

Afghan attitudes towards the treatment of captured combatants reflect the ambivalence and Islamic dilemma at the heart of their attitudes towards the protection of civilians. The great majority of those surveyed insist that captured combatants should never be harmed. Those with the greatest firsthand knowledge of the war, in fact display even greater mercy than others. Yet despite Islamic teachings which counsel that captured combatants must be protected, a significant minority of Afghans – both fighters and civilians – accept abuse of captured combatants, especially torture. A variety of factors – including fear of retribution from released captured combatants, revenge and ignorance – lead to abuses. Fighters and religious teachers find justification for such actions in Islamic principles, which set different standards for captured combatants who embrace the teachings of Islam and those who do not.

### Treatment of captured combatants

In the survey, only 13 per cent of respondents say they think captured enemy combatants sometimes deserve to die. Similarly, only 19 per cent sanction the killing of captured combatants by one side in a conflict if the other side is doing the same. Civilians offer distinct opinions:

We would say a prisoner should never be hurt, injured or killed. (FG, housewives, Faizabad)

Killing prisoners is the harbinger of defame and shame. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

...it is a sin. They are children of someone. Why do we kill mankind? (IDI, housewife, Charpark Laghman)

Killing a prisoner is condemnable. Neither *Sharia* nor morality can allow this. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

We are Muslims and have faith in our religion. One Muslim should be protected by other Muslims. I will not mistreat [the prisoner]. (IDI, refugee woman, Peshawar)

Others urged fighters to treat captured combatants well, voicing the hope that such actions will lead to reduced tensions.

They should avoid response in the same coin. Releasing prisoners might soften the hearts of the opposition and it can be a first step towards peace. It is always the work of courageous and great souls to forgive the opponents. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

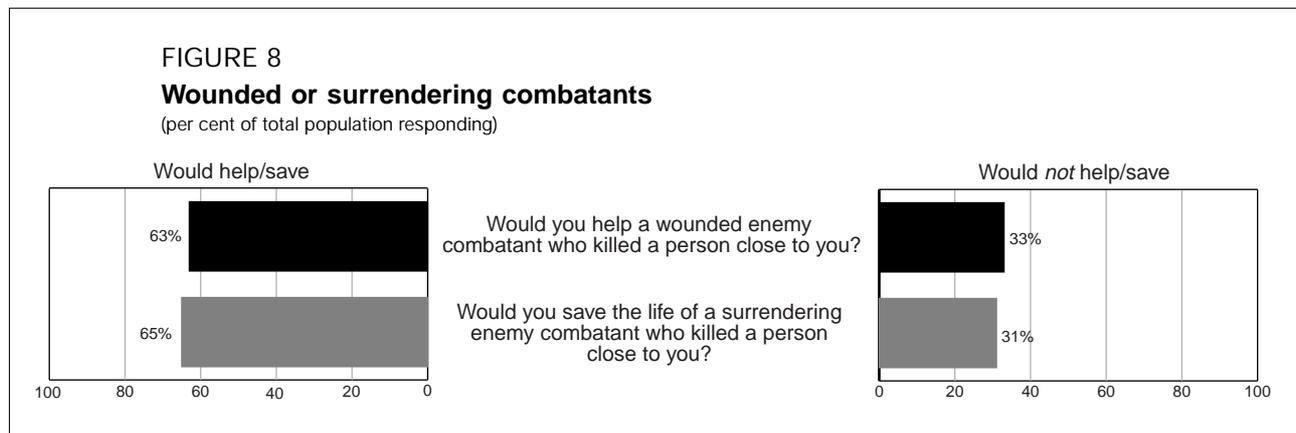
[Moderator: Why will you not punish an injured prisoner?]

Because he is a human being. If he is involved in some tragedy he should not be punish[ed]. [The] saying is: "Blood does not mean blood in return." He should be cared [for], looked after properly. When he will [be] free he will be able to tell others about good treatment of his enemy. (IDI, scholar, Charikar)

However, when respondents are faced with specific scenarios involving life-or-death decisions regarding enemy combatants, their capacity for mercy is diluted. Two-thirds of respondents (65 per cent) say they would save the life of a surrendering combatant who had killed a person close to them, but almost one in three (31 per cent) say they would not. The same holds true when respondents are asked if

they would help a wounded enemy combatant who had killed someone close to them (63 per cent compared with 33 per cent). (See Figure 8.) One farmer offered an honest explanation of the struggle he would face:

If it is the matter of feeling and someone kills my brother, son or father, I would kill four to avenge the death of four. But reason and mind say something else. I would definitely help the needy if I remain in my senses. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)



Closer examination of these findings provides further evidence that those who know war and its harshest experiences best are more likely than those more distant from the conflict to be generous with their enemies. (See the section on Women's roles and reality, p. 9.) Combatants are more likely than non-combatants (69 per cent compared with 64 per cent) to say they would come to the aid of a surrendering or wounded enemy combatant who had killed a person close to them. Sixty-six per cent of those who were imprisoned or lived under enemy control – compared with 62 per cent of those who had neither experience – say they would save or help an enemy combatant in such situations. Those who have been physically mistreated while held captive or living under enemy control are more likely to say they would behave mercifully if faced with this dilemma; 69 per cent say they would save or help the person, compared with 62 per cent of those who were not mistreated. Across these categories – and contrary to what might be expected – respondents are only slightly more likely to say that enemy combatants might deserve to die (15 per cent of combatants compared with 12 per cent of non-combatants) or to sanction the killing of captured combatants if the other side were doing it (22 per cent of combatants compared with 18 per cent of non-combatants). In addition, 58 per cent of those who experienced fewer than 4 of 12 possible negative consequences of war say they would save or help a surrendering or wounded enemy combatant compared with 69 per cent of those who experienced four or more negative consequences.

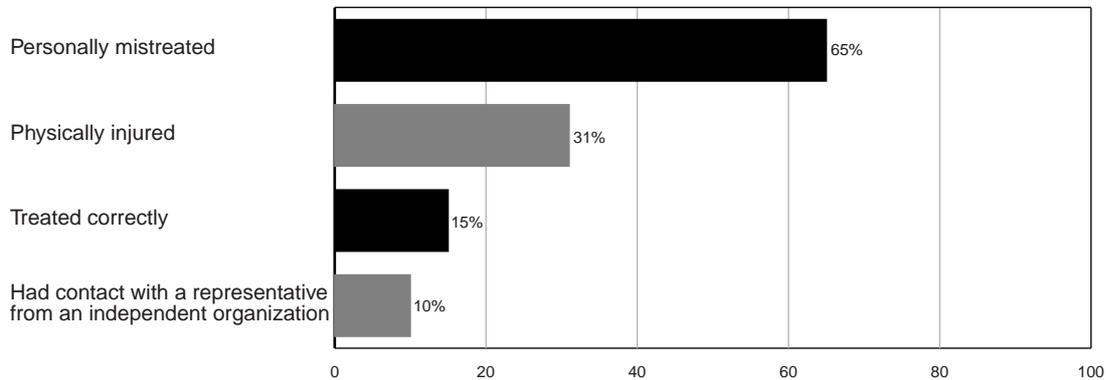
Three in ten respondents believe that captured enemy combatants can be subjected to torture in order to obtain important military information; 64 per cent think otherwise. The survey paints an ugly picture of the experiences of the almost one-quarter of Afghan respondents (22 per cent) who say they have been imprisoned during the war and the nearly half (44 per cent) who say they have lived under enemy control. Of this group, only 15 per cent say they were treated correctly, one in three (31 per cent) report being physically injured and two in three (65 per cent) say they were personally mistreated. (See Figure 9.)

Men were more likely than women to be mistreated (76 per cent compared with 52 per cent) and combatants are almost twice as likely as non-combatants to report being physically injured while imprisoned or under enemy control (45 per cent compared with 26 per cent). In a stark illustration of the difference between the ideal and the reality of war, nearly nine in ten respondents (89 per cent) say that

FIGURE 9

**While under enemy control**

(per cent of those imprisoned or under enemy control)



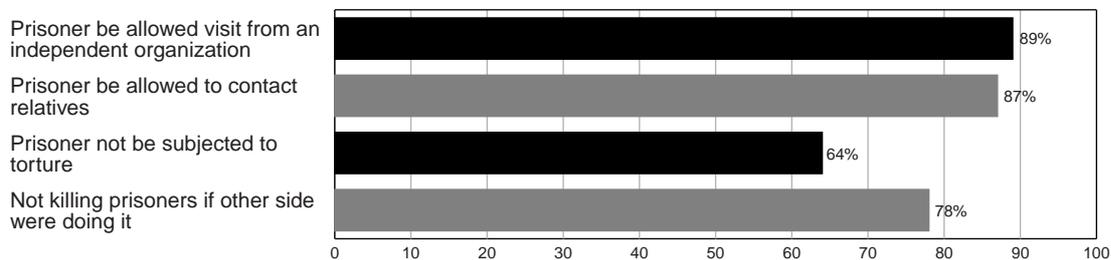
Question: Please tell me whether any of the following happened while you were under enemy control.

captured enemy combatants have the right to be visited by a representative of an independent organization, yet only 10 per cent of those who were actually imprisoned confirm that they received such visits.

FIGURE 10

**Captured enemy combatants**

(per cent of total population responding)



Question: Now let me ask you how captured combatants should be treated.

**Islam as a guide**

In focus groups and in-depth interviews, participants uniformly turned to Islam when asked to explain why captured combatants should be protected. Religious teachers point to strict Islamic guidelines on the treatment of captured combatants – and rewards for those who abide by these principles.

[If] it is a prisoner or someone is wounded, you are not supposed to attack them. Islam emphasizes this quite a lot. When the opposing party is not able to attack you any more, then you are not allowed to harm them either. To some people, they are prisoners and they put them to the dogs or they put them to lions for them to eat. There were some prisoners who were burned alive... things like this are absolute atrocities and are not allowed. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

Islam is a religion which emphasizes human rights. God knows when we misbehave with prisoners, i.e., don't provide them [with] food and [a] proper place. He will give punishments for misdeeds. (IDI, religious leader, Charpark Laghman)

God is pleased with those who treat a prisoner and often a widow kindly. There is a very special place from God for all these people. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

If you had people who need support, if you [rescue] them from a difficult place, if you give them water, if you give them food, if you give them money to run away, all these are good deeds and anybody who does these things will be rewarded by Allah. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

When asked for their opinions about the treatment of captured combatants, Afghan fighters on all sides of the war – Taliban forces, fighters of the opposing Northern Coalition and *mujahideen* who have taken refuge in Pakistan – turn immediately to Islam.

Islam has laid down very [stringent] rules on the rights of prisoners of war. He has to be treated very well and every care has to be taken of his needs. And if someone violates this, he is going against the *Sharia*... (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

[The Prophet's] dearest uncle Amir Hamza killed a person, and he even mutilated his body, the Prophet still didn't take revenge and forgave him. So we are not to take revenge and have to surrender such persons, if arrested, to a special department which has to decide the matter according to the *Sharia*. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

[Moderator: If the other side is killing prisoners would you recommend killing them on your side as well?]

No, never. It is something inhuman, un-Islamic and we don't accept that and we would never approve of it. (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad)

[Moderator: What do [you] think about the warring factions that kill prisoners of war or torture them?]

Personally, I condemn this. I have myself arrested many [prisoners of war]. But, we have never maltreated them. Neither we have tortured them nor killed them... We again oppose and condemn this thing, because neither Islam nor any other religion allows torture of prisoners or their killing. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

How, then, to explain the captured combatants who were burned alive and those who, as the fighters add, were tortured or mistreated? In focus groups, several people echoed the comments of a female refugee that captured combatants were killed because their captors "don't want them to be ever able to fight again" and fear that they will one day end up "on their hit list". (FG, refugee women, Peshawar)

*Mujahideen* fighters offer other explanations, attributing such killings to "personal enmity", "personal bias" or "taking revenge upon them for [the deaths of] their relations". (FG, former *mujahideen*

fighters, Peshawar) One medical doctor cited religious teachings that sanction such activities: "Islam gives us a law of *Qisas*. The way one torture[s] the other, he should be tortured the same way." (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul)

Still others – both fighters and civilians – essentially deny that those fighting in the name of Islam could be consciously capable of such actions. Captors, they say, are simply ignorant of the Islamic principles and rules of war that govern the treatment of captured combatants.

[Moderator: Prisoners of war are treated very cruelly. What is your opinion on the issue?]

To me it has two reasons. First the captor is unaware of the importance of the prisoner and knows nothing [of] what to do to him. Second, he does this because he is not aware, or simply illiterate. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

No one can justify the killing of prisoners of war. It can be the work of ignorants, lunatics. They are simply not aware how to treat the POWs. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

If they were aware of the rights of prisoners, about the principles of war, they would never do these things. It is mainly due to ignorance that these things happen. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

The critical factor in understanding how abuses of captured combatants occur, however, is revealed in the explanation of the distinction made in Islam between the treatment of captives who are Muslims and those who are non-believers. This distinction, in essence, sanctions a two-tiered system of treatment for captured combatants: one for those who embrace the teachings of Islam, another for those who do not.

There is a difference between the treatment of a Muslim prisoner and non-Muslim prisoner of war. I think the Muslim prisoner we can forgive him and if the court decides that he is guilty, then he will be punished. But in the case of a non-Muslim, if he converts and becomes a Muslim, then he would get this treatment. Otherwise you know, he is fighting Islam and Muslims and he is committing a bitter crime. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

Muslims are very kind-hearted people and were also being ordered by their Amir not to kill or torture those [who] recite *Kalma*. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)<sup>24</sup>

It should be seen what crime he has committed. If he is very sinful then he should be killed. (IDI, traffic policeman, Kabul)

The prisoner should be taken care of until... he embraces Islam. For until a prisoner embraces Islam, then he should be murdered because it creates violence. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

<sup>24</sup> An "Amir" is a religious ruler, or "ruler of the faithful". The *Kalma* is the first pillar of Islam that states: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger".

## Breakdown of limits

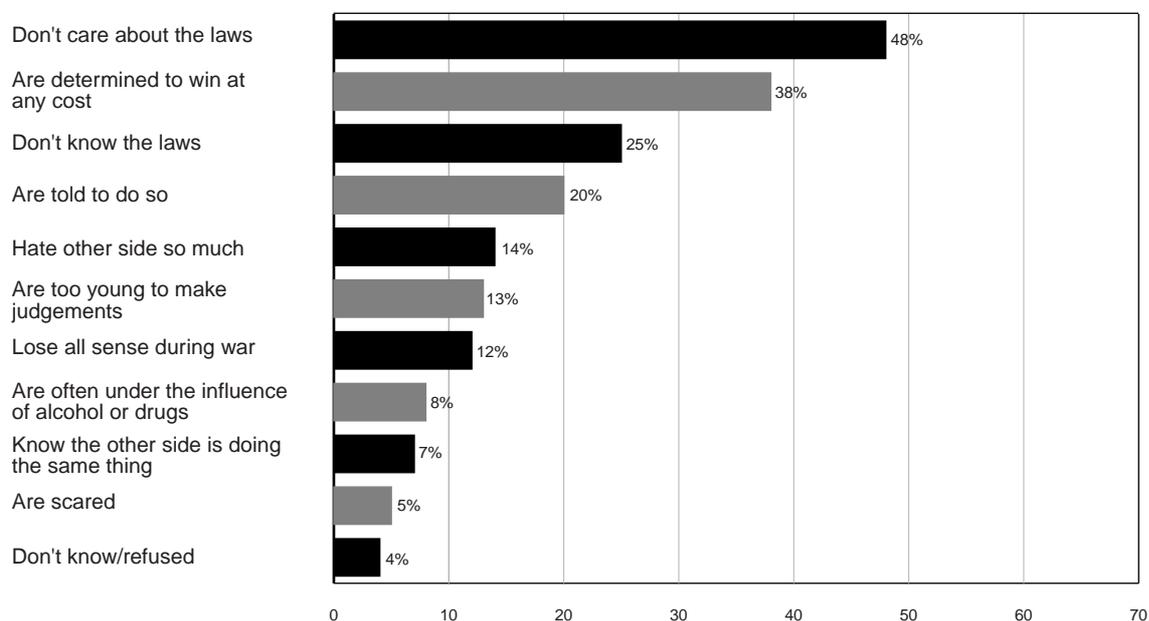
Twenty years of conflict in Afghanistan have unleashed a never-ending wave of destruction that has swamped traditional protections for civilians and swept aside long-accepted rules of wartime behaviour. In the decade since the Soviets left Afghanistan, most elements of the war – its combatants, its causes, its players and its weapons – have changed. Yet, no matter the factions that have occupied the battlefield or the goals professed, attacks on civilians – strictly forbidden, according to the Islamic principles in which Afghans are schooled and steeped – have continued unabated. Afghans have certainly not rejected their faith; if anything, the seemingly endless violence has bound them closer to their faith. Nor have they consciously set out to violate the rules of war or to destroy their neighbours, their villages and their country.

When survey respondents are presented with a list of possible reasons to explain why combatants attack civilians, they are divided between those who see such acts as wilful and those who seem not to want to blame the combatants. A near majority (48 per cent) say that combatants kill civilians because they “don’t care about the laws”, 38 per cent say that combatants are “determined to win at any cost” and 14 per cent blame it on hatred of the enemy. But an equal number of respondents pick reasons that absolve the combatants of blame: 25 per cent say combatants are ignorant of the law, 20 per cent say they are following orders, while others say they are too young to make judgements (13 per cent), “lose all sense during war” (12 per cent) or are under the influence of alcohol or drugs (8 per cent).

FIGURE 11

### Why combatants attack civilians

(per cent of total population responding) (top two responses)



Question: Which *two* of the following reasons best explain why combatants attack or hurt civilians, even though many people say it is not okay or maybe against the law. Is it because...?

These answers help point the way towards the three essential elements of the Afghan war that have combined to dissolve the limits meant to protect civilians during battle: the nature of a 20-year war; the character of the combatants; and the sense of mission that has driven the conflict in all its phases.

## A 20-year war

Any hope that civilians would be protected during wartime in Afghanistan was dashed when the Soviet army began its campaign to root out the *mujahideen*. Soviet leaders began the invasion in 1979 believing that a relatively small number of troops, when combined with the regular Afghan army, could easily dispatch the fragmented, lightly armed forces that opposed them. It took two years for them to recognize their error and respond.

When the Soviet generals decided to change tactics, they doubled, then tripled the number of Soviet troops in the theatre of war. They introduced ever more modern and dangerous weaponry. And they launched a “scorched earth” policy meant to intimidate villagers who supported the *mujahideen* and drive the fighters from their mountain positions. Guerrilla fighters drifted in and out of villages, broke into small groups and shifted positions constantly — practices that were the best route to survival for many.

In such conditions, civilians did not stand a chance; those who stayed in their homes risked attack at any time – and from any side. As one former *mujahideen* fighter explained:

When we were waging *jihad* against the Soviet Union we had to attack the general public. But we used to convey them a message according to the principles of Islam that as [an] un-Islamic system is enforced in their area they should cooperate with us, or be ready for bombing. After that we had to make the attack. [The Soviets], too, wouldn't spare us. They would bomb our whole villages just for nabbing one *mujahid*. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

In the decade of factional fighting that has followed the departure of Soviet troops, civilians have faced similar treatment from their own countrymen. A bewildering array of *mujahideen* groups have faced each other in battle, formed and reformed alliances, created coalitions and then resumed fighting. Tens of thousands of combatants have been killed or wounded, driving the different factions to recruit new fighters, by force if necessary.

From the focus group discussions it appears that today's fighters seem to have given up on even trying to avoid those who are not carrying arms.

It is not possible to fight against [combatants] only. Where there [are combatants] there is population. In case of attack both are affected. (IDI, Northern Coalition fighter, Charikar)

Previously the bloodshed was done by only those groups who were fighting against each other, but later the bloodshed became a routine... There was no law or basic humanity to act upon. (IDI, NGO worker, Mazar-I-Sharif)

[Moderator: Why do you use huge weapons against the civilians?]

We are compelled to do this. This is because these people had used shells and missiles against us. Our women, children and men were killed. We had to retaliate. But in the heart of our hearts, we had never favoured this. And even then if we had harmed our own people, we beg pardon of our Allah. We had never done this wilfully. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

As the years have passed, the cycle of violence – battle breeding battle, killings begetting killings – has grown deeper and more destructive. As one farmer described the situation: “All the groups involved want to revenge the killing of their colleagues by double.” (FG, farmers, Jalalabad) Civilians have

been caught in the crossfire of this war, which has pitted brother against brother, Afghan against Afghan, Muslim against Muslim.

...the people have grown up in the war, but have not learnt its rules. Wars are being fought in other countr[ies] too, but there the harm and damage inflicted on civilians are zero in comparison to the one done to the Afghans. [Here] they are killing each others' children and wives... (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

When two people quarrel, they go to any extent to cause damage to the opponent. War itself is a fire, which destroys everything. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

### **Character of the combatants**

The character of an army – its training, officers and discipline – is crucial to its behaviour during wartime. There is no guarantee, of course, that a well-trained, uniformed professional army will observe the rules of war. Yet it is equally true that combatants who have never been trained or made aware of the rules of war lack even the most basic of benchmarks to guide their behaviour in combat.

In focus groups and interviews, many participants said that the destruction of the education system during the Soviet invasion left a heavy, painful mark on the generation that has fought in the past decade. Fighters and civilians painted a picture of irregular, ever-changing forces made up of men and boys, many of whom had never handled a weapon until the day they were recruited or forced to join a fighting unit. These fighters were enmeshed in a fluid and unstable war in which "everyone is a leader and commander". (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad) As focus groups and in-depth interviews reveal, many combatants were unschooled in the rules of war, incapable of making mature decisions and unquestioning in their response to orders.

...many years of war have left a number of people uneducated. So most of the people are uneducated, illiterate, ignorant and they don't differentiate between good and bad. (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad)

Actually our fighters [are] uneducated. They can't discriminate between good and bad. They only know [how] to use Kalashnikovs. They don't care [about] laws. (IDI, artist, Charikar)

It is necessary for a fighter to be aware of the principles and aim of his fighting, as at 18 no one can differentiate between good and bad. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

This person [a combatant] should also understand about his homeland, his country, the interests of his people. Then he should be allowed to carry a gun. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

They don't know about Islam. They follow the orders of their leaders. (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

...whatever these young people are ordered, they obey it. (IDI, traffic policeman, Kabul)

With such forces in the field, the chances that the rules of war will be broken – or simply remain unknown – are very high. In turn, the potential for attacks on civilians, whether intentional or not,

increase. One member of the Northern Coalition who is still at war with the Taliban eloquently summed up the situation:

When there is no civilization, no education then there is ignorance and when there is ignorance then everything happens there. They have no sense of humanity... They can't differentiate between good and bad. At that time they think everyone is our enemy and when he recovers [and] thinks about humanity, it is already too late. [He] has killed many people, civilians. It is inhuman. (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad)

### **The sense of mission**

From the original *mujahideen* that came together "out of sheer compulsion" to expel the Soviet invaders, to the Northern Coalition fighters and the Taliban "forced to take up arms" against their countrymen, a sense of mission has driven Afghan fighters in their quest to defeat their enemies. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar; FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad) Throughout the two decades of conflict, these missions have been firmly grounded in Islam, most notably in the concept of the *jihad*. What Afghan fighters see as their quest to defeat evil – no matter its form or nationality – has placed at risk all those who disagree with or fail to offer active support for the cause. Simply put, the power of faith has overwhelmed the rules of war.

In the entire ICRC consultation in Afghanistan, no better description of the dilemma posed by Islam appears than the statement by a fighter of the Northern Coalition that "war is not good but when it is need[ed], it should be carried out where it doesn't affect civilians." (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad) The idea of a "needed" or "necessary" war is integral to an understanding of the events that have turned Afghanistan upside down and killed or wounded millions of its people. As participants in the focus groups explained, Islam countenances the *jihad*, allows one to distinguish between just and unjust wars, and leaves the combatants with no choice but to fight:

Islamic laws are as clear as the sun. There is Islamic teaching that if you fight against God and against his prophet then you are liable to be punished. God says either you kill them or try to reform them. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

If war is against the aggressor or evil it is good. But if not then it should be avoided. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

War, basically, war is a wrong thing. We are all Muslims. We should fight with Hindus. We should [be] united. (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar)

Whatever has been done in Afghanistan or is going on we didn't want this. We had done *jihad* for the will of Allah. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

This system of justification, as has been seen, is mirrored in discussions on the treatment of captured combatants, in which one fighter explained that unless a prisoner embraces Islam "he should be murdered" and a religious leader said that a non-Muslim prisoner can be treated differently because "he is committing a bitter crime". (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar; FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

Similar justifications are voiced by members of the Taliban forces who say they are "fighting in the length and breadth of Afghanistan against evil, and for justice". These fighters insist that "we were and are against the war", but have been compelled to launch their campaign against the other factions in order to enforce their interpretation of the *Sharia*. That civilians should be caught up in the current war is unsurprising, given one fighter's explanation of how Taliban forces proceed:

Before we invade an area we send in our representative and tell them the reasons of our coming there. We tell [them] that our purpose is not to conquer land, but to purge the society of evils like boozing, prostitution, etc. We talked to them many times so that, if possible, war and destruction should be avoided. But when we failed to persuade them then we had no option but to declare war on them. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

In Afghanistan today, those who share a feeling that they are deeply committed to the Islamic way of life are nonetheless fighting each other. In their quest to acquire the power to interpret the *Quran* and apply it to people's lives, Afghan fighters have adopted a mission that – even with the best of intentions under the most ideal conditions – is bound to bring civilians into the line of fire.

After so many years of infighting and conflict, the Afghan people seem to have arrived at the conclusion that the rules of war are no match for the nature of human beings. A war without end seems to have quieted the fury in the voices of Afghan civilians, leaving them alternately frustrated and fatalistic:

Warriors are not bound by any law. They set their laws themselves and then follow them. They do what they want to do. (IDI, medical worker, Hirat)

There are laws [of war]. But fighters don't follow laws. They do what they want to do. (IDI, journalist, Kabul)

Nothing should be done [against civilians] in war but warriors do everything. (IDI, housewife, Charpark Laghman)

...human brain[s] do not work in war. They [fighters] don't understand the difference between guilty and innocent people. (IDI, scholar, Charikar)

...we have a saying of the Prophet that someone who does not fear Allah can do what he likes and he has no control over what he does. We believe that anyone who does things like [attacking civilians] will be taken to task by Allah on the day of judgement for his actions... But anyone who does not believe that, well what is there to stop them from doing what they like? (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

## International law and institutions

### Geneva Conventions

There is limited consciousness in Afghanistan of the Geneva Conventions or other international treaties governing warfare. Only one in four respondents (24 per cent) say they have heard of the Geneva Conventions, while 62 per cent say they have not. Of those aware of them, 85 per cent describe them accurately – making it one in five Afghans overall who have a working understanding of the Geneva Conventions. Men are more likely than women to have heard of them (29 per cent compared with 19 per cent), a reflection perhaps of their more frequent exposure to imprisonment, combat and higher levels of education. Women who know about them, on the other hand, are much more likely than men to describe them accurately (96 per cent compared with 78 per cent). Recognition also rises with the level of a respondent's education.

When asked to describe the Geneva Conventions, more than four in ten respondents (43 per cent) volunteer that they are meant to help limit or stop wars or promote peace. A higher percentage offers even more specific descriptions; 26 per cent say the Geneva Conventions help protect the wounded, 21 per cent say they help protect captured combatants and another 20 per cent say they help protect civilians and victims of war.

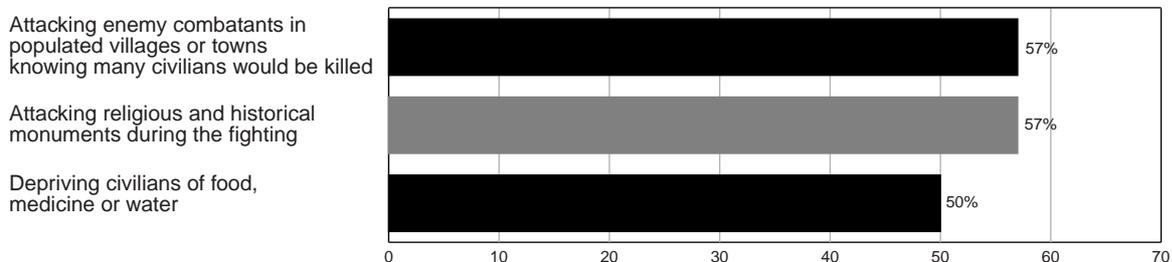
The survey offers mixed evidence of the impact that awareness of the Geneva Conventions might have on a person's attitudes towards the treatment of civilians and captured combatants. On the one hand, those who have heard of them are much more likely to say that people who break laws governing wartime behaviour should be punished (82 per cent compared with 51 per cent). Those aware of them are also less likely to sanction the killing of captured combatants or to say they would disregard a defenceless enemy captive in need of help and more likely to say that captured combatants cannot be subjected to torture (68 per cent compared with 64 per cent).<sup>25</sup>

Respondents are twice as likely to be aware of specific laws that protect civilians during wartime as they are of the Geneva Conventions. At least half believe there are laws against depriving civilian populations of food, medicine or water (50 per cent), attacking populated villages knowing that many civilians would be killed (57 per cent), and laws against attacking religious and historical monuments (57 per cent). When answering these questions, respondents are more likely to refer to the provisions of the *Sharia*, than to details of the Geneva Conventions. (See Figure 12.)

FIGURE 12

### Knowledge of laws

(per cent of total population responding "yes")



Question: Are there laws that say you can't do that, even if it would help weaken the enemy?

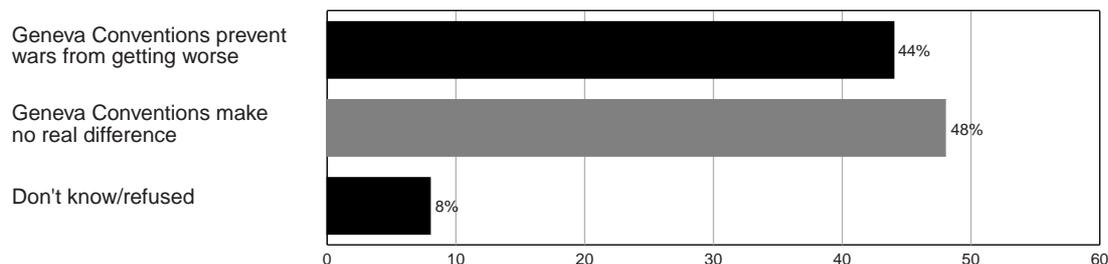
<sup>25</sup> On the question of saving or helping a surrendering or wounded enemy combatant, those who have *not* heard of the Geneva Conventions are more likely to say they would *not* save or help one (32 per cent versus 26 per cent). Those who have *not* heard of the Conventions are more likely to sanction the killing of prisoners if the other side were doing the same (22 per cent versus 15 per cent).

Afghan respondents are evenly split when asked about the efficacy of the Geneva Conventions. After being read a description of the Conventions, 44 per cent say they help prevent wars from getting worse, while 48 per cent say they make no real difference. Half of respondents who were imprisoned or lived under enemy control (50 per cent) have faith in the Geneva Conventions, compared with only 34 per cent of those who did not have these experiences. Men are more likely to say the Conventions make no difference (53 per cent versus 42 per cent of women) as are people who have more than a primary school education (53 per cent compared with 45 per cent of those with a primary level education or less).

FIGURE 13

**Impact of Geneva Conventions**

(per cent of total population responding)



Question: Do you think the existence of the Geneva Conventions prevents wars from getting worse or does it make no real difference?

**Punishment of war crimes**

There is little consensus among Afghans as to the punishment of those who have committed war crimes. Fifty-six per cent of respondents say there are rules in war so important that those who violate them should be punished. Fully one-third (33 per cent) disagree, however, perhaps reflecting the desire among Afghans to put the past behind them. Men, more educated respondents and those who have experienced more negative consequences of the war are all more likely to say war criminals should be punished. (See Figure 14.)

Those who believe there are laws important enough to warrant punishment for the perpetrators are referring to international law (47 per cent), while 26 per cent of Afghans surveyed cite religious tenets and 19 per cent Afghan law.<sup>26</sup>

Islam, as always, lies at the centre of Afghan thinking on wartime behaviour. More than seven in ten Afghans (71 per cent) say that people who have violated the rules of war should be put on trial. Twenty per cent, however, say that war criminals should either be granted amnesty or forgiven, additional evidence that a significant minority of Afghans have no desire to review the record of the past decade or to settle scores.

Afghans believe overwhelmingly that their national institutions should be responsible for punishing those who violate the rules of war. A total of 79 per cent of respondents say that the Afghan courts, government, military or civilians themselves should judge war criminals. Only 11 per cent of those surveyed would refer such matters to an international criminal court.

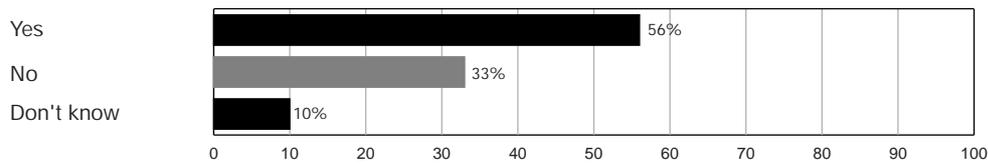
Women are much more likely than men to say the Afghan government, and not Afghan courts, should judge such cases, perhaps reflecting their experiences with the traditional, all-male Islamic judicial process. Twenty-four per cent of women say these cases should be decided in Afghan courts, compared with 40 per cent of men; the gap widens further when the attitudes of women under the age of 40 are

<sup>26</sup> Those who cite Afghan law, however, are likely referring to the *Sharia* – making a total of 45 per cent who refer to religion.

FIGURE 14

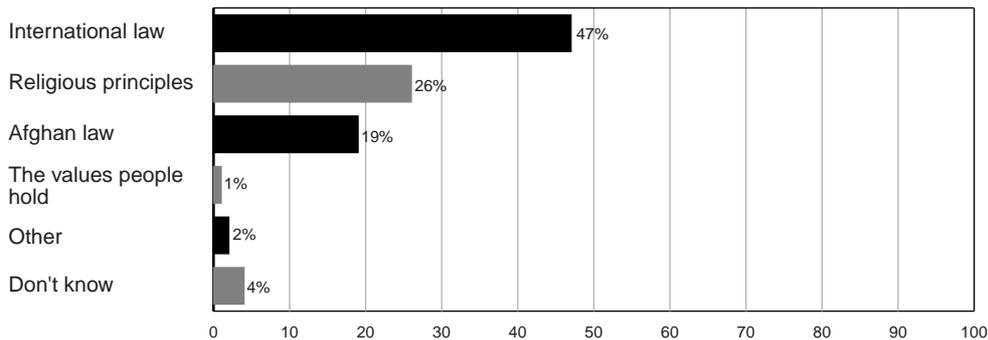
**War crimes**

(per cent of total population responding)



Question: Are there rules or laws that are so important that, if broken during war, the person who broke them should be punished?

(per cent of those responding "yes")



Question: What are these rules based on?

compared with men over 40.<sup>27</sup> Combatants are more likely to opt for Afghan courts (49 per cent compared with 27 per cent of non-combatants). Non-combatants are nearly three times more likely to say cases should be decided by an international court (14 per cent compared with 5 per cent of combatants).

In focus groups, civilian participants stressed their desire for a government to be formed that can make laws based on Islamic teachings to handle such cases. (FG, refugee women, Peshawar; FG, female medical doctors, Kabul) "All [the] big leaders should get together. There should be a big *jirga* [national assembly] where legislation should be passed with mutual consent. They should consult [the] *Quran* for laws of punishment." (FG, illiterate refugee women, Peshawar) Others offered a less optimistic perspective. "[As] a house is run by an elder, so is the government. It is the duty of the ruler to take war criminals to task. But we have no elder or leader at the moment." (FG, farmers, Jalalabad) A number of participants said that only Allah can mete out punishment to war criminals.

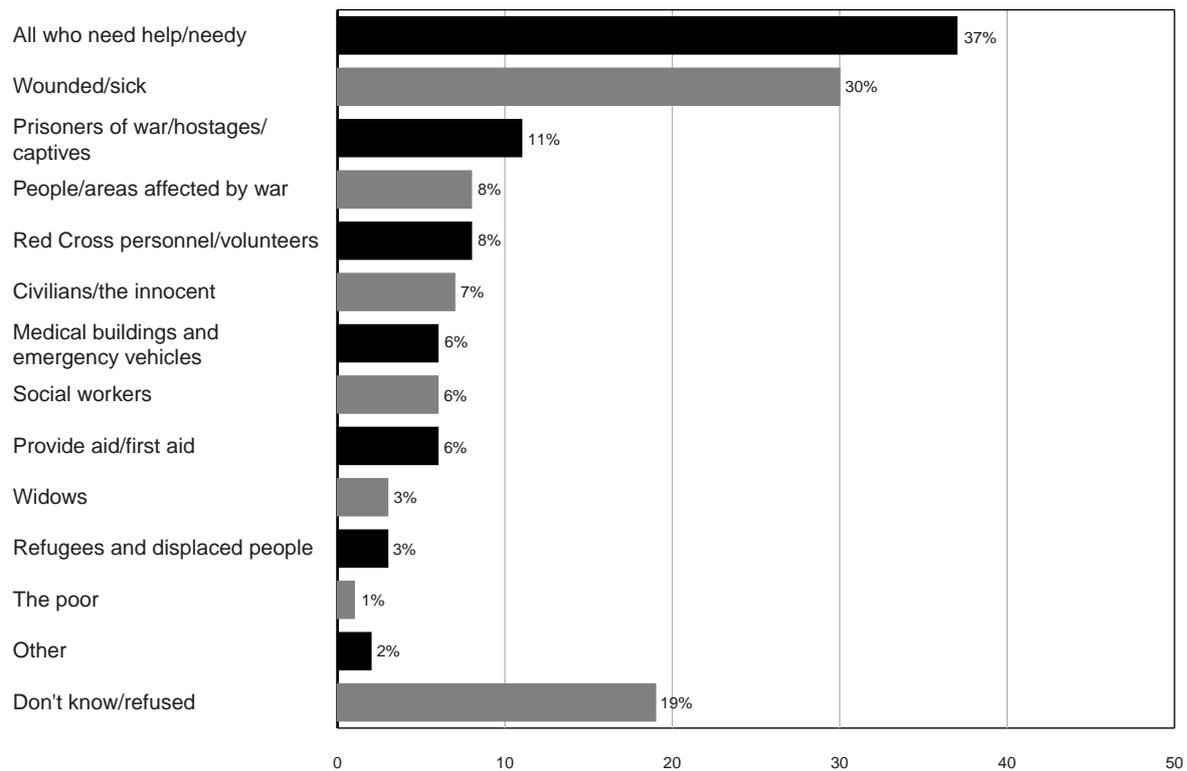
**The role of the ICRC/Red Cross/Red Crescent and international organizations**

Years of helping Afghans within the country and those who have fled to neighbouring countries have left the ICRC/Red Cross/Red Crescent not only widely known but also well respected by the people of Afghanistan. More than eight in ten respondents (81 per cent) could identify the red cross emblem. Seventy-one per cent of respondents with a primary school education or less could identify the emblem, compared with 96 per cent of those who have gone past middle school.

Afghans associate the emblem with protecting the vulnerable and those injured or displaced by war. Thirty-seven per cent say the emblem protects all who need help, while another 18 per cent say it helps those living in conflict areas, refugees and civilians more generally. A total of 44 per cent of respondents associate the emblem with protecting and helping the sick and wounded and medical personnel and vehicles. (See Figure 15.)

<sup>27</sup> Women, by a margin of 46 per cent to 30 per cent, are more likely to say the Afghan government should judge such cases.

**FIGURE 15**  
**Red Cross and protection**  
 (per cent of total population responding)



Question: What kind of people or things does this symbol (red cross emblem) protect?

The ICRC/Red Crescent and the UN are given shared credit for doing the most throughout the war to help Afghan civilians. Forty-four per cent of respondents say the UN played the biggest role in helping civilians cope with the war, and 40 per cent cite the ICRC/Red Crescent. In addition, about one-third of those surveyed say that international humanitarian organizations in general played the biggest role in helping civilians – no doubt a reflection of their intense involvement in the Pakistani refugee camps – and 11 per cent mention religious leaders. (See Figure 16.)

Asked to whom they would turn for help or protection if their homes and towns were threatened, Afghans point to the ICRC/Red Crescent and the UN (40 per cent and 36 per cent, respectively). Sixteen per cent of respondents say they would appeal to religious leaders for help, and one in ten say they would turn to foreign countries or humanitarian organizations in general.

In focus groups, however, participants' comments reflected their Islamic faith and their experiences of the last 20 years:

To God, they turn to God for help.

They turn to God and pray. Who else [can] they turn to?

Or course we will turn to elders who care about us... We will ask them to lead us and show us the way...

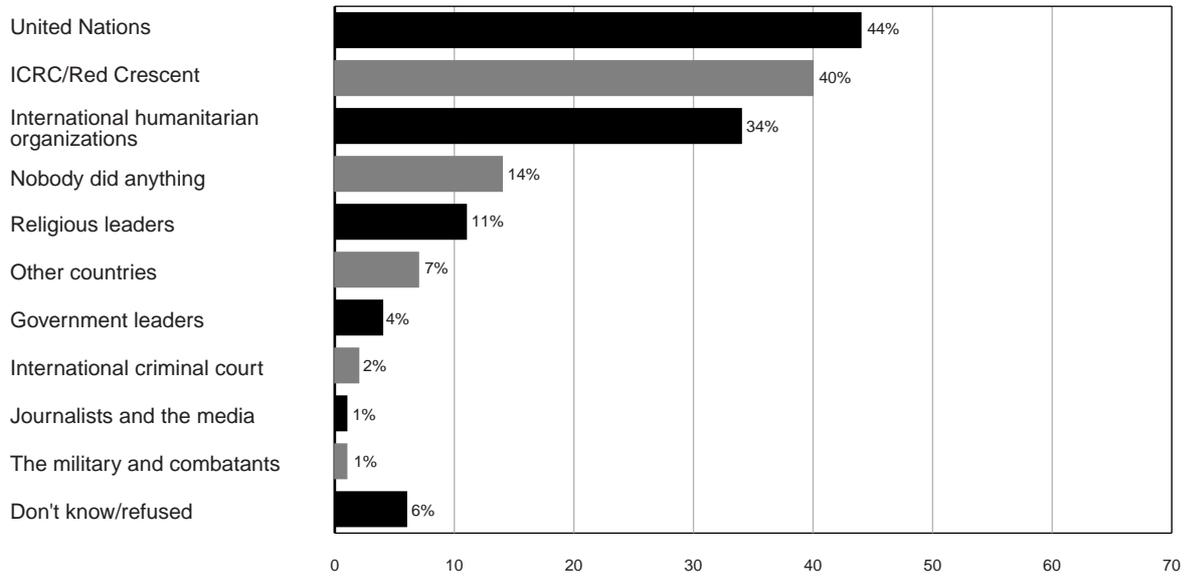
We can't do anything. We just have to pray to God for help.

(FG, housewives, Faizabad)

FIGURE 16

**Biggest role**

(per cent of total population responding) (top two responses)

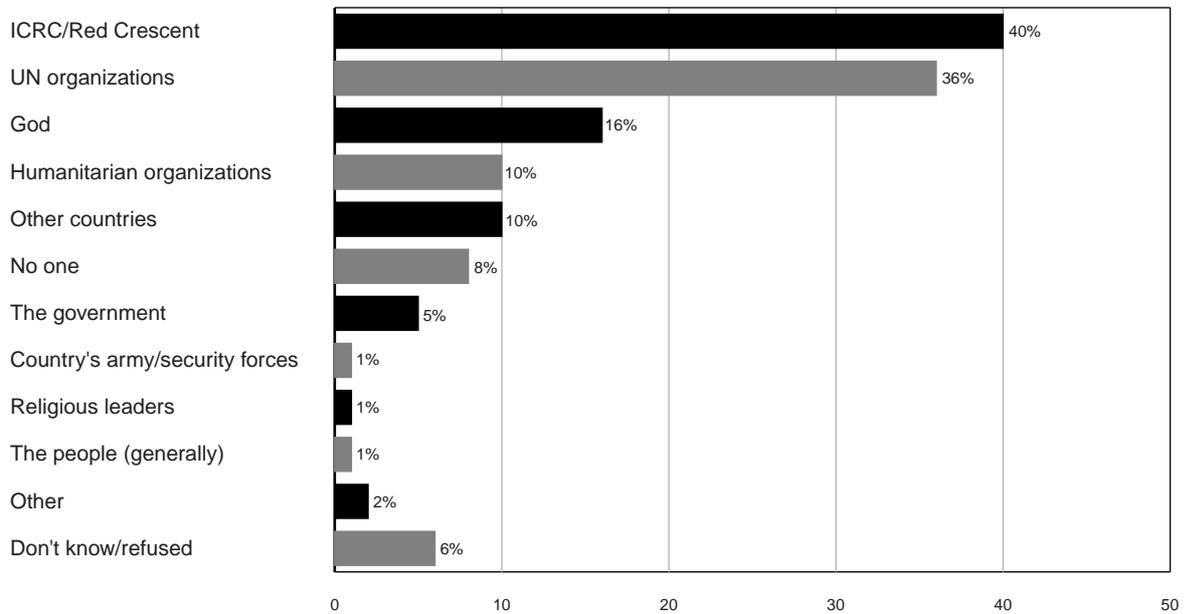


Question: I'm now going to describe different kinds of people and organizations. Please tell me which *two* of these have played the biggest role during the war to stop civilian areas from being attacked or cut off from food, water, medical supplies and electricity.

FIGURE 17

**Turn to for help**

(per cent of total population responding) (open-ended question)



Question: Let me ask what can be done if during the war civilian areas are attacked, towns or villages are cut off from food, water, medical supplies and electricity? To whom would you turn to get help or to be protected?

I think in such times we have to turn to Allah for help... (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

To none but Allah as He is the real provider. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

To turn to God is essential, but NGOs are to be allowed to carry on their work without hindrance. (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

[Moderator: When these civilians are attacked, who can provide protection to them?]

They will migrate, they will be displaced, so [they] will be in a very bad condition. During the war nobody can help them. (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad)

### **The responsibility of Afghan leaders**

The ICRC consultation demonstrates a growing, almost palpable, anger with those who are seen as responsible for the continuing conflict. People are exhausted and frustrated by the ongoing fighting among brothers and Muslims and angry with those who perpetuate the war. In turn, they are ready to fault the faction leaders, who "lust for power at Kabul", have become "greedy and worldly and prisoners to our instincts", and fight "for power and [the throne] whereas [they once fought] for [the] self-respect of the country and Islam." (FG, farmers, Jalalabad; FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

The people who want to prolong this war are not friendly to their land. They are pursuing their own interests. They are Afghans only by name. They are doing it for dollars, hence shedding the blood of their own brothers. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

...our leaders are dishonest. If they are not dishonest with their country and stop taking foreign advice, then no one can harm us or our country. (FG, refugee women, Peshawar)

Our leaders follow [external] suggestions without giving it [a] second thought. They should think for their country. They own this country. They have spent their lives here. Its interests should be their first priority. But they think for their personal interests. (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul)

First they fought Russians, but [they] are now ready to cut each other's throats. They can go to any extent for downing the opposition. They have no soft corner for their people. One group wants this, the other that. And in the process innocent Afghans are made the scapegoats. Peace is impossible in Afghanistan unless these groups accept the blunders they have committed and sit around the table. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

All of this has happened in a leadership vacuum, as the traditional sources of stability have lost their influence or disappeared from the scene.

...war has deprived us of our elders... whose [wise] remarks and [advice] were like prints on solid rocks. That tradition has gone to the dogs. Now everyone is independent and is like a herd without a shepherd. No one is responsible for anyone. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

When war between two individuals or two States starts, Islam says that [a] mediator should arbitrate with justice. But in our case whosoever has interfered has done so for their personal interest. That is why the war is still on. (FG, former *mujahideen* fighters, Peshawar)

...we have no elder or leader at the moment. Hence everyone is after the throat of the other. Here when anyone becomes a ruler instead of defusing the war, he wants to continue it. And we are being ruined because of them. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

### **Looking outward**

When searching for answers to why their country has endured two decades of war, Afghans are tempted to look outside their borders. In an ironic twist of history, Afghans are prepared to turn to foreign powers and the international community for help in bringing peace to their country. Perhaps this is a measure of the desperation they feel as they yearn for peace to return to their people and for their country to be reunified. In focus groups and interviews, civilians, fighters and religious teachers alike seemed ready to temporarily surrender their fierce tradition of independence in search of an end to two decades of war.

We request other countries that they should help in seizing this foreign war so we can go back to our home town and lead our lives safely with comfort. (FG, refugee women, Peshawar)

I would say that when two brothers quarrel they won't come to terms unless a grey-bearded elder negotiates between them. So we ask our neighbours to take pity and help us resolve this lingering issue. They can do it. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

[Moderator: How can this war be stopped?]

There are countries which can force them [the factions] into negotiations. At international level, every country can play a role to diffuse the Afghan imbroglio. If they stopped supplying weapons, war itself [would] come to a halt... (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

We need outside countries to collect arms and weapons [from] Afghanistan and work out peace in Afghanistan. (FG, housewives, Faizabad)

The neighbouring countries should solve the issue, especially Russia, China and Iran... they should try to form a central government and with cooperation of the UN and other neighbouring countries, they should work together for the reconstruction of the country and rebuilding. (FG, Northern Coalition fighters, Faizabad)

Everybody who was looking at Afghanistan [was] expecting to help Afghanistan after the Russians left... When they saw these parties are fighting amongst themselves, then they withdrew that aid from Afghanistan. So we are still very aggrieved at our treatment by the rest of the world. (FG, religious teachers, Kabul)

This desire for outside help takes several forms: more than two-thirds of survey respondents (68 per cent) say that they want the international community to intervene more in the future to help civilians in the throes of war. Only 8 per cent of Afghans say that this kind of assistance should be curtailed; 14 per cent say it should be stopped altogether.

In the focus groups, several fighters and religious teachers also suggested that, because Afghans currently have no judicial system that could judge cases of war crimes, neighbouring countries or international institutions might be invited to help. One religious teacher said that if commanders prove incapable of punishing their troops who violate the rules of war, then the international community should be approached. But he was careful to add "...we respect those laws of the international community which are not contradictory to [the] *Quran*. In the same way, they should not interfere with our laws which are in the *Quran*." (FG, religious teachers, Kabul) In Afghanistan, requests for outside assistance will be tempered by historical memories and the teachings of Islam.

### **The necessity of peace**

After two decades of war, Afghans are ready – indeed, desperate – for peace. In the focus groups and in-depth interviews, many participants echoed the comments of the Taliban fighter who said that "the 20-year Afghan war has made no one victorious." (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad) Others found the prospect of more war almost unimaginable, using apocalyptic language to describe their country's plight:

If the war will continue in this fashion then no one will survive, neither a man nor an animal. The country will become a barren deserted land. (FG, refugee women, Peshawar)

Now our country is at that stage where no one is worried for future, no one is concerned for past. Everyone is worried for his present. This is all because of war. What else is worse than this? (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul)

Afghans are well aware of the damage that war has visited on their youth and that escaping "the Kalashnikov culture" – and teaching the next generation to imagine that there is more to life than guns and tanks – will be an extraordinarily difficult task. They know, too, that millions of people will have to rebuild their lives almost from scratch, that even if the warring parties were to reach agreement today on a peace plan, it will be decades into the next century before their country is economically strong enough to support its people.

Participants in the focus groups agreed that, first and foremost, progress will require stability. There was almost uniform agreement, as one Taliban fighter said, that "a stable and strong government is the need of the hour". (FG, Taliban fighters, Jalalabad)

Leaders should sit together to solve the issues. They shouldn't destroy their country any more. They shouldn't harm their people now. They should go for negotiation. (FG, female medical doctors, Kabul)

The need of the hour is unity among Afghans. With it war would die. (FG, farmers, Jalalabad)

Of course our biggest hope is that the war is stopped and everything is resumed. We will start from zero but at least there would be a start. (FG, housewives, Faizabad)

Many Afghans describe the wars of the past decade as useless, pointless or senseless. In spite of this, Afghans have demonstrated their fabled resilience to hardship. They even remain optimistic that there can be peace; only 17 per cent of those surveyed predict that there will be more war in the future. More than half of respondents (58 per cent) say that there will be peace.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Curiously, optimism about the future tends to be higher among those who have suffered more negative consequences of the war. Sixty per cent of those who experienced four or more of the 12 negative consequences listed in the survey say that there will be peace in the future; only 48 per cent of those who have experienced three or less of the consequences agree.

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## Annex 1: General methodology

The ICRC's worldwide consultation on the rules of war, which is the cornerstone of the People on War project, was carried out in 12 countries that have been ravaged by war over the past decades. In each case, the ICRC conducted a public opinion survey with a representative sample of the country's population and organized in-depth interviews and focus groups with those involved in or directly affected by the conflict.

For comparative purposes, the views of people were also sought in France, Russian Federation, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States on the basis of the opinion survey only.

The consultation was based on three principal research methods:

- A survey of 1,000 (in some cases 1,500) respondents representative of the country's general population;
- Focus groups (between 8 and 12 depending on the country) allowing a professionally moderated and intensive discussion in small groups;
- In-depth, face-to-face interviews (about 20 in each country) with individuals with specific war experiences.

In almost every case, the ICRC and local Red Cross or Red Crescent staff conducted the interviews, organized the focus groups, including recruitment of participants, and helped with translation/interpreting. Greenberg Research, with a local partner company, developed the sample design for the survey, processed data in electronic form, provided moderators and prepared transcripts.

### **Opinion survey**

*Questionnaire.* The opinion survey questioned people on their war experiences and views on international humanitarian law. The survey was mainly standardized for all countries, though the wording was modified to reflect each context and to achieve consistent meaning. About 10 per cent of the questions were contextual and in many cases unique to the country. In an additional five countries, the questionnaire was designed to elicit people's perceptions on war and humanitarian law.

The questionnaires were developed by Greenberg Research, in consultation with the ICRC, on the basis of interviews with humanitarian law experts in the United States and Europe. The survey and questions were pre-tested in Mozambique and Colombia.

*Sample design.* In each country, interviews were held with 1,000 to 1,500 respondents, selected by a stratified, multistage cluster sampling method. The sample was stratified to ensure representation (500 interviews) from each of the principal conflict-affected geographic areas or ethnic/religious groups. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, this meant some 1,500 interviews (500 from Republika Srpska and 500 each from the Bosniac and Croat areas of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina); in Israel, the occupied territories and the autonomous territories, this meant 1,000 interviews (500 in Israel and 500 in the occupied territories and the autonomous territories). These areas were divided into urban and rural geographic units (strata), to ensure representation of urban and rural populations.

The local partner randomly selected small geographic units within these strata. These units – 100 to 200 in each country – constituted the sampling points for the survey. In each geographic unit, 10 households (though fewer in some countries) were selected using a random route method appropriate to

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the country. In some cases, interviewers were provided with a map and a route; in others, interviewers were simply given a route and selection instructions.

Within households, respondents were selected using a Kish grid (a respondent selection key that employs a combination of random numbers, alphabet codes and the number of available members in a household to identify the appropriate respondent) or the birthday criterion (a respondent selection process that employs dates of birth to determine the appropriate respondent). Interviewers were to make three attempts to achieve a completed interview, including locating the respondent elsewhere. In nearly every country, non-response was below 10 per cent.

The demographic distribution of the surveyed respondents was compared with the best available census data on education, age, household type and occupation. Where the sample survey was sharply skewed (e.g., too many college-educated or too many young respondents), statistical weights were applied to eliminate the bias.

Interviews carried out by phone reached 755 adults in France, 1,000 in Switzerland, 750 in the United Kingdom and 1,000 in the United States, and 1,000 face-to-face interviews were carried out in the Russian Federation.

*Survey administration.* In nearly all the countries, the survey was administered by the ICRC, with the assistance of Greenberg Research and a local research partner. Interviews were conducted by Red Cross or Red Crescent staff. Greenberg Research provided training, which typically took two days.

*Parallel research.* In three of the countries – Colombia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Philippines – Greenberg Research commissioned a parallel quantitative survey, administered by a local research company using professional interviewers, in order to identify patterns of bias. The results of the parallel studies were then compared with the results of the ICRC-administered surveys. The exercise found only a few areas of systematic bias. Those interviewed by the ICRC and Red Cross or Red Crescent staff, for example, were consistently more supportive of the ICRC's role and more aware of the Geneva Conventions and the rules of war. However, the parallel research found few systematic differences in opinions on international humanitarian law. The ICRC results closely resemble the parallel survey results on most other questions. (A technical report assessing the parallel research and Red Cross bias is available separately.)

### **In-depth research**

*Focus groups.* The focus groups provided a relatively unstructured environment for people to discuss their war experiences freely, express their views on the appropriate limits to war and consider possible actions against those who exceed them. To be effective, the groups had to be as homogeneous as possible, that is, the participants all had to have similar characteristics. Thus, in general, the participants in a group came from the same area, were all male or all female and shared an important experience (e.g., families of missing persons, ex-soldiers, ex-fighters, prisoners, teachers or journalists). The discussions were frequently intense and emotional and provide a rich commentary on how the public approaches these issues.

In each country, 8 to 12 focus groups were organized – four in each of the principal conflict areas. The participants were recruited by Red Cross or Red Crescent staff, based on guidelines provided by Greenberg Research. The local research company provided a professional moderator, who facilitated the discussions using guidelines prepared by Greenberg Research.

The discussions were held in focus-group facilities, school classrooms, hotel rooms and even in the open air, if, for example, they involved guerrilla fighters. ICRC, Red Cross/Red Crescent and

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Greenberg Research staff observed and listened to the discussions from an adjoining location, with simultaneous translation in English. The focus group discussions were recorded and later transcribed in English.

*In-depth interviews.* To help interpret the full meaning of the survey responses, about 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals who had had specific war experiences. The in-depth interview guidelines repeated questions from the public opinion survey, although they allowed for open-ended, rather than categorized responses. Interviewers were encouraged to probe and follow up on responses.

The in-depth interviews involved a broad range of people – officers, medical personnel, students (secondary school and university), journalists, former combatants, refugees, displaced persons, family members of missing persons, war invalids and others.

The interviews were recorded on tape, transcribed and translated into English by the local partner.

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## Annex 2: Questionnaire\*

### Introduction

We are doing a series of interviews on **[NAME OF COUNTRY]** and would like your help with that. Would it be possible to ask a few questions to the person who is 18 years or older and whose birthday is **[FIRST AFTER TODAY]**? **[IF NECESSARY: The interview will take about 30 minutes.]** The questions are about your experiences and opinions on the [war/armed conflict] in **[NAME OF COUNTRY OR REGION]**. Your identity will remain absolutely confidential.

Let me begin by asking you some questions about yourself to make sure we are talking to all kinds of people. If you don't want to answer, feel free to tell me so and we will move on to the next question.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

[Don't know/refused]

2. How many years of school have you had? \_\_\_\_\_ years

[Don't know/refused]

3. What is your current family situation?

Married (have a husband or wife)

Single

Live together with someone (in a permanent relationship)

Divorced (or separated)

Spouse of missing person

Widow(er)

[Don't know/refused]

4. Do you have children? **[FOLLOW UP IF "YES"]** How many?

No children

Yes \_\_\_ children

5. What is your job now or are you not working?

Farmer

Manual worker

Skilled worker

Self-employed

Housewife/home care

Soldier (combatant)

Government employee

Private sector employee

Teacher/professor/intellectual

Pensioner/retired

Unemployed (but looking for work)

Unemployed (not looking for work)

Student

Other **[SPECIFY]**

[Don't know/refused]

\* This questionnaire is the standard one used in the 12 countries affected by conflict in the last decades. Some contextual questions were added for specific countries. These do not figure here, but are reflected in the findings presented in each Country Report.

6. Let me ask about the war in [COUNTRY NAME]. Did the war take place in the area where you were living or did the war take place mainly somewhere else?

- Area where you were living → GO TO Q7  
 Somewhere else? → GO TO Q8  
 Both [Volunteered response] → GO TO Q8  
 [Don't know/refused]? → GO TO Q8

7. [IF "AREA WHERE YOU WERE LIVING" IN PREVIOUS QUESTION] Did you live in that area before the [war/armed conflict], move voluntarily, or were you forced to move? [PROBE IF RESPONDENT SAYS "THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN ARMED CONFLICT"]

- Live in same area  
 Moved voluntarily  
 Forced to move  
 [Don't know/refused]

8. [ASK OF ALL RESPONDENTS] During the [war/armed conflict], did you ever find yourself in a situation of being a combatant and carrying a weapon?

- Yes — combatant, carried weapon  
 No — not a combatant  
 [Don't know/refused]

9. [ASK OF ALL RESPONDENTS] Is there anything that combatants should not be allowed to do in fighting their enemy? [PROBE AND WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]

[IF NO RESPONSE, GO TO Q11]

10. [IF RESPONDENT GIVES ANY RESPONSE TO PREVIOUS QUESTION] Could you tell me the main reason why they should not do that? Is that because...? [READ AND ROTATE]

- It's wrong → GO TO Q10a  
 It just causes too many problems → GO TO Q10b  
 [Don't know/refused] → GO TO Q11

[FOLLOW UP IF MORE THAN ONE REASON SELECTED] Which would be the main reason?

- 10a. [IF "IT'S WRONG"] When you say, it's wrong, is it primarily wrong because it is...? [READ AND ROTATE] [TWO RESPONSES ALLOWED]

- Against your religion  
 Against your personal code  
 Against the law  
 Against what most people here believe  
 Against your culture  
 Against human rights  
 Other [SPECIFY]  
 [Don't know/refused]

10b. **[IF "IT JUST CAUSES TOO MANY PROBLEMS"]** When you say, it just causes too many problems, are you thinking it...? **[READ AND ROTATE] [TWO RESPONSES ALLOWED]**

- Produces too much hate and division
- Causes too much psychological damage
- Produces too much destruction
- Causes too much physical suffering
- Other **[SPECIFY]**
- [Don't know/refused]

11. Which two of these words best describe the war for you personally? **[READ AND ROTATE]**

- Horrible
- Disruptive
- Humiliating
- Exciting
- Hateful
- Challenging
- Hopeful
- Confusing
- Uncertainty
- Powerless
- Remote
- [Don't know/refused]

**Note: Version used in countries where there are no clear sides for most of the population; for countries where there are sides, half the surveys will be asked Version A (without sided wording) and half Version B (with sided wording).**

12. Now I would like to ask you some *general* questions about how, in your view, combatants should behave in times of war.

**Version A:** When combatants attack to weaken the enemy, should they...? **[READ AND ROTATE]**

**Version B:** When combatants from your side attack to weaken the enemy, should they... ? **[READ AND ROTATE]**

- Attack enemy combatants and civilians
  - Attack enemy combatants and avoid civilians as much as possible
- OR**
- Attack only enemy combatants and leave the civilians alone
  - [Don't know/refused]

**[FOLLOW-UP IF CONFUSION ABOUT YOUR/OTHER SIDE]** Just imagine that there is a side in the conflict that you support more than any other side.

**Note: in the next set of questions we will be randomly splitting the sample in two. Version 1 will be asked of one half and version 2 will be asked of the other half. If there are clear sides to the war, Version 1 coincides with Version A and Version 2 coincides with Version B. (This means there will always be two and exactly two versions of the questionnaire.)**

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Let me ask you about some things that combatants may do to weaken the enemy they are fighting against. Please tell me for each of these things whether it is okay or not okay to do it, to weaken the enemy.

13. **Version 1:** Attacking civilians who voluntarily gave food and shelter to enemy combatants. Would it be okay or not okay to attack them in order to weaken the enemy?

**Version 2:** Attacking civilians who were forced to give food and shelter to enemy combatants. Would it be okay or not okay to attack them in order to weaken the enemy?

- Okay  
 Not okay  
 [Don't know/refused]

14. **Version 1:** Attacking civilians who voluntarily transported ammunition for enemy combatants defending their town. Would it be okay or not okay to attack them to weaken the enemy?

**Version 2:** Attacking civilians who were forced to transport ammunition for enemy combatants defending their town. Would it be okay or not okay to attack them to weaken the enemy?

- Okay  
 Not okay  
 [Don't know/refused]

15. I will now describe some situations that may happen during a [war/armed conflict]. For each situation, I would like you to imagine that you are part of that situation. Tell me how you think you would behave if the decisions were completely up to you. Here comes the first imaginary situation.

**Version 1:** Would you save the life of a surrendering enemy combatant who killed a person close to you?

- Would save  
 Would not save  
 [Don't know/refused]

**Version 2:** Would you help a wounded enemy combatant who killed a person close to you?

- Would help  
 Would not help  
 [Don't know/refused]

Now I'm going to ask your opinion on some of the things combatants might do in times of [war/armed conflict].

- 16a. **Version A:** What about depriving the civilian population of food, medicine or water in order to weaken the enemy?

**Version B:** What about depriving the civilian population on the other side of food, medicine or water in order to weaken the enemy?

Is that wrong or just part of war?

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- Wrong
- Part of war
- Both [Volunteered response]
- [Don't know/refused]

16b. **Version A:** Are there any laws or rules that say you can't do that, even if it would help weaken the enemy, or are there no laws or rules to stop that?

**Version B:** Are there any laws or rules that say you can't do that, even if it would help your side weaken the enemy, or are there no laws or rules to stop that?

- Laws — can't do that
- No laws
- [Don't know/refused]

17a. **Version 1:** What about attacking enemy combatants in populated villages or towns in order to weaken the enemy, knowing that many civilians would be killed?

**Version 2:** What about attacking enemy combatants in populated villages or towns in order to weaken the enemy, knowing that many women and children would be killed?

Is that wrong or just part of war?

- Wrong
- Part of war
- Both [Volunteered response]
- [Don't know/refused]

17b. **Version A:** Are there any laws or rules that say you can't do that, even if it would help weaken the enemy, or are there no laws or rules to stop that?

**Version B:** Are there any laws or rules that say you can't do that, even if it would help your side weaken the enemy, or are there no laws or rules to stop that?

- Laws — can't do that
- No laws
- [Don't know/refused]

18. **[ASK ONLY IN WAR ZONES WHERE APPROPRIATE]** What about attacking religious and historical monuments, in order to weaken the enemy. Is that wrong or just part of war?

- Wrong
  - Part of war
  - Both [Volunteered response]
  - [Don't know/refused]
-

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19. **[ASK ONLY IN WAR ZONES WHERE APPROPRIATE]** What about taking civilian hostages in order to get something in exchange? Is that wrong or just part of war?

- Wrong
- Part of war
- Both [Volunteered response]
- [Don't know/refused]

20. **[ASK ONLY IN WAR ZONES WHERE APPROPRIATE]** Now a question about the "protected areas". Do you think that these "protected areas" are a good or a bad idea?

- Good idea
- Bad idea
- [Don't know/refused]

21. **[ASK ONLY IN WAR ZONES WHERE APPROPRIATE]** Did the "protected areas" make it better or worse for civilians during the war, or did they make no difference?

- Better
- Worse
- No difference
- [Don't know/refused]

22. **[ASK ONLY IN WAR ZONES WHERE APPROPRIATE] Version 1:** Did the "Peace support operation" make it better or worse for civilians during the war, or didn't it make any difference?

**Version 2:** Did the "Peace support operation" make it better or worse for you personally during the war, or didn't it make any difference?

- Better
- Worse
- No difference
- [Don't know/refused]

**Version A:** Let me ask you about some other things that might happen during war to weaken the enemy. Please tell me for each of these things whether it is okay or not okay to do it in order to weaken the enemy.

**Version B:** Let me ask you about some other things that your side might do to weaken the enemy during war. Please tell me for each of these things whether it is okay or not okay to do it in order to weaken the enemy.

23. First, are there types of weapons that should just never be used during war? **[FOLLOW UP IF YES]** What types of weapons would you think of? **[CHECK RESPONSE BELOW] [DO NOT READ CHOICES] [MULTIPLE ANSWERS ALLOWED]**

- Landmines
  - Laser weapons
  - Napalm
  - Nuclear weapons
  - Chemical weapons
  - Cluster bombs
-

- Other [SPECIFY]
- No types of weapons allowed
- [Don't know/refused]

24. **Version A:** Combatants planting landmines to stop the movement of enemy combatants, even though civilians may step on them accidentally. Is it okay or not okay to do that if it would weaken the enemy?

**Version B:** Combatants on your side planting landmines to stop the movement of enemy combatants, even though civilians may step on them accidentally. Is it okay or not okay to do that if it would weaken the enemy?

- Okay, if necessary
- Not okay
- [Don't know/refused]

25. In war, combatants sometimes attack or hurt civilians, even though many people say it is not okay and maybe against the law. So please tell me why you think combatants attack civilians anyway. **[PROBE AND WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]**

26. Which *two* of the following reasons best explain why combatants attack or hurt civilians, even though many people say it is not okay or maybe against the law. Is it because they...? **[READ AND ROTATE RESPONSES] [FOLLOW-UP IF MORE THAN TWO REASONS SELECTED]** Which would be the two main reasons?

- Don't care about the laws
- Hate the other side so much
- Are determined to win at any cost
- Lose all sense during war
- Are too young to make judgements
- Don't know the laws
- Are often under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- Are scared
- Are told to do so
- Know the other side is doing the same thing
- [Don't know/refused]

27a. Now let me ask you how *captured combatants* should be treated.

**Version A:** Must a captured enemy combatant be allowed to contact relatives, or doesn't that have to be allowed?

**Version B:** Must your side allow a captured enemy combatant to contact relatives, or don't you have to allow that?

- Must allow
- Don't have to allow
- [Don't know/refused]

27b. **Version A:** Is it true that a captured enemy combatant cannot be subjected to torture to obtain important military information, or can captured combatants be subjected to torture?

**Version B:** Is it true that your side cannot subject a captured enemy combatant to torture to obtain important military information, or can you subject captured combatants to torture?

- Cannot subject  
 Can subject  
 [Don't know/refused]

27c. **Version A:** Must a captured enemy combatant be allowed a visit by a representative from an independent organization outside the prison or camp, or doesn't that have to be allowed?

**Version B:** Must your side allow a captured enemy combatant to be visited by a representative from an independent organization from outside the prison or camp, or don't you have to allow that?

- Must allow → GO TO Q27d  
 Don't have to allow → GO TO Q28  
 [Don't know/refused] → GO TO Q28

27d. **[IF "MUST ALLOW"]** Which of the following people should be allowed to visit captured enemy combatants...? **[READ AND ROTATE RESPONSES] [ALLOW MULTIPLE RESPONSES]**

- International Committee of the Red Cross representatives  
 UN representatives  
 Human rights group representatives  
 Journalists  
 Religious clerics/ministers  
 Other **[SPECIFY]**  
 [Don't know/refused]

Once again, I want you to *imagine* yourself in the following situations and tell me what you think you would do if the decisions were completely up to you.

28. **Version A:** If one side in the war is killing prisoners, would you approve the killing of prisoners by the other side or would you not approve it?

**Version B:** If the other side in the war is killing prisoners, would you approve the killing of prisoners by your side or would you not approve it?

- Would approve  
 Would not approve  
 [Don't know/refused]

**[FOLLOW UP IF RESPONDENT PROTESTS]** Just imagine you happen to find yourself in this situation.

29. In general, do you ever think that captured enemy combatants deserve to die?

- Think deserve to die  
 No  
 [Don't know/refused]

30. Now I'm going to ask you about your actual experiences during the war. Please tell me whether any of the following things happened to you personally or did not happen as a consequence of the [war/armed conflict] in [COUNTRY NAME]. **[READ AND ROTATE ORDER]**

	Happened	Did not happen	Don't know/ refused
Forced to leave your home and live elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Imprisoned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kidnapped or taken hostage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tortured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Felt humiliated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lost contact with a close relative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A member of your immediate family killed during the armed conflict (son, daughter, father, mother, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather, grandchild)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Serious damage to your property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded by the fighting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Combatants took food away	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Had your house looted	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Somebody you knew well was sexually assaulted by combatants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>[READ LAST]</b> Somebody you knew well was raped by combatants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

31. **[ASK ALL RESPONDENTS]** Were you imprisoned by enemy combatants or were you living in an area that came under enemy control?

Imprisoned by enemy combatants	<b>→ GO TO Q32</b>
Living in area under enemy control	<b>→ GO TO Q32</b>
Both [Volunteered response]	<b>→ GO TO Q32</b>
[Don't know/refused]	<b>→ GO TO Q34</b>
No response	<b>→ GO TO Q34</b>

32. **[ASK IF "IMPRISONED", "LIVED UNDER ENEMY CONTROL", OR BOTH]** Please tell me whether any of the following happened while you were under enemy control. **[READ AND ROTATE]** Did that happen or not?

	Happened	Did not happen	Don't know/ refused
You were personally mistreated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
You were physically injured	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
You were treated correctly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>[READ LAST]</b> You had a contact with a representative from an independent organization to check on your well-being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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33. **[ASK ONLY IF CONTACT HAPPENED, OTHERWISE GO TO Q33]** Which of the following people did you have contact with to check on your well-being? **[READ AND ROTATE RESPONSES]** **[ALLOW MULTIPLE RESPONSES]**

- ICRC representatives
- UN representatives
- Human rights group representatives
- Journalists
- Religious clerics/ministers
- Other **[SPECIFY]**
- [Don't know/refused]

34. Now let me ask you for your opinion about something else, about young people being combatants. At what age is a young person mature enough to be a combatant? **[READ LIST UNTIL RESPONDENT CHOOSES AN ANSWER]**

- 14 or under
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- Above 21
- [Don't know/refused]

35. During the war, did you support [have you supported] one of the sides or did you not support any side?

- Supported a side
- Did not support a side
- [Don't know/refused]

36. Let me ask you something very different. Have you ever heard of the Geneva Conventions?

- Yes — heard
- No — not heard      **→ GO TO Q38**
- [Don't know/refused]      **→ GO TO Q38**

37. **[IF HEARD OF GENEVA CONVENTIONS]** Could you tell me what the Geneva Conventions are about? **[WRITE DOWN ANSWER AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]** **[MARK APPROPRIATE RESPONSE]**

- Accurate **[ANY REFERENCE TO LIMITS IN WAR]**
  - Not accurate **[NO REFERENCE TO LIMITS IN WAR]**
-

38. Let me read you a statement about the Geneva Conventions:

*The Geneva Conventions is a series of international treaties that impose limits in war by describing some rules of war. Most countries in the world have signed these treaties.*

Do you think the existence of the Geneva Conventions prevents wars from getting worse or does it make no real difference?

- Prevents wars from getting worse
- No real difference
- [Don't know/refused]

39. Are you familiar with this? **[SHOW RED CROSS OR RED CRESCENT]** What does it stand for? **[DO NOT READ RESPONSES]**

- Red Cross
- Red Crescent
- Red Cross and Red Crescent
- Medical/Hospital
- United Nations
- Army
- Other **[SPECIFY]**
- [Don't know/refused]

40. What kind of people or things does this symbol protect? **[WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]**

41. Are there rules or laws that are so important that, if broken during war, the person who broke them should be punished?

- Yes
- No → GO TO Q46
- [Don't know/Refused] → GO TO Q46

42. **[IF YES]** So what kind of rules or laws are you thinking about? **[PROBE AND WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]**

43. **[IF RESPONDS TO PRIOR QUESTION, OTHERWISE GO TO Q46]** What are these rules based on? **[READ AND ROTATE] [ONE RESPONSE ONLY]**

- [Country name]'s laws
- International law
- Religious principles
- The values people hold
- Other **[SPECIFY]**
- [Don't know/refused]

44. If these rules are broken in war, who should be responsible for punishing the wrongdoers? **[READ AND ROTATE] [ONE RESPONSE ONLY]**

- The government of [country name]
- The [country name]'s courts
- International criminal court
- The military itself
- The civilian population
- Your own political leaders
- Other **[SPECIFY]**
- [Does not apply, rules are not broken]
- [Don't know/refused]

45. When the war is over, should people who have broken these rules...? **[READ AND ROTATE] [ONE RESPONSE ONLY]**

- Be put on trial
- Be exposed to the public but not be put on trial
- Be forgotten when the war is over
- Be forgiven after the war
- Granted amnesty
- [Don't know/refused]

46. **[ASK ALL RESPONDENTS]** Let me ask what can be done *if* during the war civilian areas are attacked, towns or villages are cut off from food, water, medical supplies and electricity. To whom would you turn to get help or to be protected? **[PROBE AND WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]**

- [Can't turn to anybody]
- [Don't know/refused]

47. I'm now going to describe different kinds of people and organizations. Please tell me which *two* of these have played the biggest role *during* the war to stop this. Here are the people and organizations: **[READ AND ROTATE] [RECORD THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT RESPONSES] [FOLLOW UP WITH: Which two have played the biggest role?]**

- The military and combatants on your side **[Version B]**
- The military and combatants of the other side **[Version B]**
- The military and combatants **[Version A]**
- Religious leaders
- International humanitarian organizations
- Journalists and the news media
- The United Nations
- The ICRC or Red Cross (or Red Crescent)
- Government leaders
- International criminal court
- Other countries
- [Nobody did anything]
- [Don't know/refused]

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48. In the future, would you like to see more or less intervention from the international community to deal with these kinds of issues?

- More intervention
- Less intervention
- [No intervention]
- [Don't know/refused]

49. Do you think the peace will last or do you think there will be more war in the future?

- Peace will last
- More war in future
- [Both]
- [Don't know/refused]

50. One last question, what did you learn from the war that you think others should know? **[PROBE AND WRITE ANSWERS AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE]**

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## **The ICRC's mission**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of war and internal violence and to provide them with assistance. It directs and coordinates the international relief activities conducted by the Movement in situations of conflict. It also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

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