

**GENEVA  
ACADEMY**

Académie de droit international  
humanitaire et de droits humains  
Academy of International  
Humanitarian Law and Human Rights



**ICRC**

# **STUDENT ESSAY COMPETITION ON**

Avoiding Civilian Harm During  
Military Cyber Operations

---

**DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS  
31 MAY 2021**

OPEN TO ALL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS



# QUESTION

Which measures – technical, policy, legal, or other – should States put in place to avoid or at least reduce the risk of civilian harm from military cyber operations during armed conflicts?

## ASSESSMENT

The jury will be composed of members of the ICRC and the Geneva Academy and will select the three best essays. The winning essays will be announced during the public launch of the ICRC's forthcoming report on Avoiding Civilian Harm during Military Cyber Operations in June 2021.

Submitted essays will be assessed on the demonstrated knowledge of the subject matter, originality of the answers, structure and clarity, and critical thinking and analysis. Each of the criteria will be awarded points as below:

- Knowledge of the subject matter: 25%
- Originality: 25%
- Structure and clarity: 25%
- Critical thinking and analysis: 25%

They offer a chilling warning about the potential humanitarian impact of military cyber operations in contemporary and future armed conflicts.

Accordingly, as part of our [Digitalization of Conflict Joint Initiative](#), we invite students from around the world to submit essays discussing which measures states should put in place to avoid or at least reduce the risk of civilian harm from military cyber operations during armed conflicts. The essays can focus on any relevant dimension of this topic, including its technical, policy, and legal aspects.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- The competition is open to all undergraduate students from universities (including military academies) anywhere in the world.
- Essays shall be written in English and must not exceed 1,000 words (including footnotes).
- The essay and a copy of the author's student identification card must be received by the Geneva Academy by 11:59pm UTC on 31 May 2021 by email ([essay-competition@geneva-academy.ch](mailto:essay-competition@geneva-academy.ch)). Both documents shall be submitted in PDF format. Late entries will not be accepted.
- The results of the competition will be announced at a public launch of the ICRC's forthcoming report on Avoiding Civilian Harm during Military Cyber Operations in June 2021.
- The best essay will be published (subject to editorial approval) on the ICRC's Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog in a blog series on the same theme in the summer of 2021. In addition, the authors of the three best essays will each receive a book prize.

## OVERVIEW

Showcase your ideas on the protection of civilians against the dangers posed by military cyber operations by entering our essay competition. We will announce the authors of the three best essays at the launch of a major ICRC report on the same theme in June 2021 and each of them will receive a book prize. In addition, the winning essay will be published on the ICRC's Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog alongside contributions by world-leading military, cyber security, and policy experts.

## BACKGROUND

In today's armed conflicts, cyber operations are increasingly used in support of and alongside kinetic operations. Several states have publicly acknowledged such use, and many more are developing military cyber capabilities as well as doctrines and policies that aim to establish national approaches and principles for the military uses of cyberspace.

In parallel, cyber incidents without, or with unclear, links to armed conflicts have resulted in damage and disruption to civilian services. These incidents have included cyber operations against hospitals, water and electrical infrastructure, and nuclear and petrochemical facilities.