

Donald Steinberg, President of World Learning—Keynote Address on “Responsibility to Protect in the Real World: A Tale of Two Countries” U.S. Institute of Peace 22 July 2013

The following is an excerpt of an address given by Donald Steinberg, President of World Learning, at the launch of the report “The United States and R2P: From Words to Action”, compiled by the U.S. Institute of Peace, the U.S. Holocaust Museum, and the Brookings Institution.

(...) Too frequently, faced with the unfinished agenda in consolidating the R2P norm and with our collective inability to prevent or stop the violence in Syria, the two Sudans, the DRC and elsewhere, we forget how much has been achieved in the dozen short years since R2P emerged on the scene (...).

The progress can be measured not just by the insertion of a couple of paragraphs into the World Summit Outcome document in 2005, or the creation of the US government’s Atrocity Prevention Board, or the welcome if unfulfilled promises of “never again” and “not on my watch.” It can also be measured by our willingness and capacity to respond to situation like Kenya, Libya and Cote d’Ivoire.

Kenya
: R2P in Action:

(...) On January 2, a week after the failed Kenyan elections, I sent a message throughout our network. It read in part: “The burning of the church in Eldoret with three dozen Kikuyus inside; the history of ethnic violence in the Rift Valley; and the hate speech prevalent among Kikuyus, Kalenjins, and Luos

takes this crisis out of the usual post-electoral conflicts and puts it squarely onto the R2P stage.

While the parallels between Kenya and Rwanda can be easily overdrawn, the deterioration in other seemingly solid African countries such as Cote d’Ivoire and Zimbabwe could easily be repeated in Kenya to tragic effect. It’s time to sound the alarm bells.”

Kofi Annan, John Kuofor, Graca Machel, Ben Mkapa and other African leaders engaged, backed by the willingness of the United States and the Security Council to sanction those resisting a peaceful solution. For those who suggest that R2P is a concept being thrust on the developing world by the global North, note that those seizing the initiative and designing the outcome were Ghanaians, South Africans, and Tanzanians.

A quick-fix solution of a power sharing arrangement was designed and implemented. But instead of turning our collective gaze aside and facing the same problem in new elections in 2013, the international community stay committed to the long-term challenges present in the R2P rebuilding mandate. (...)

(...) The result in 2013 was a mostly peaceful election, and a sense that we didn't just dodge a bullet, we helped build a more democratic and inclusive process – even if it paradoxically elected leaders under investigation for ethnic crimes. (...)

Rwanda

: R2P Inaction:

For me, the actions in Kenya were particularly welcome as a contrast to the U.S. response to Rwanda a decade and a half earlier, when I was President Clinton's special assistant for Africa. (...)

We could have jammed the hate language on the radio station, Mille Collines. We could have reinforced General Romeo Dallaire's forces. We could have pressed immediately for new UN or African peacekeepers to save as many lives as possible.

But each time we pushed for these steps, others would ask: “Where's the legal basis for these actions? Where's the public outcry, the hallelujah chorus of support? How do we know our actions will end the killings?” (...) Time and again, the forces of inaction triumphed until the genocide burned itself out.

The New World of R2P:

Fortunately, we've moved beyond apologies and mea culpas for the failed response to Rwanda, as well as Somalia and Bosnia. Indeed, it was in these failures of will that the roots of R2P were formed. Consider the changes.

First, the international community has increasingly engaged in preventive actions to keep societies from falling apart – including deploying more than 100,000 military, police, and civilian personnel in UN peacekeeping operations. (...) Second, country after country has stepped forward militarily in potential R2P situations, such as the NATO and its allies in Libya and Kosovo, South Africans in Burundi, the British in Sierra Leone, the French in Cote d'Ivoire and Mali, the African Union in Darfur, the Americans in Macedonia, and the Australians in East Timor. Of course, we should not add to the misconception that R2P is mostly or exclusively

about non-consensual military action: such action is choice of last resort, to be used in the context of efforts at diplomacy, sanctions, humanitarian assistance, naming and shaming, and the like. (...)

The Atrocity Prevention Board:

Let’s talk briefly about what the APB is and what it isn’t. The APB is not a quick fix method of creating political will for actions that would otherwise not be taken, nor is it a backdoor to avoid answering tough questions about military engagement, including the seriousness of the threat, the primary purpose for engagement, the need for proportionality, an assessment of the balance of consequences, and the need for UN authorization for action.

Instead, the APB’s focuses on three types of situations. First, for issues firmly on the USG foreign affairs radar screen, the APB provides expert guidance about the potential for atrocities in these situations and best practices to prevent and address them. (...)

Second, the APB helps sound alarm bells in situations where the US government and the broader international community may not be paying adequate attention to emerging or potential atrocity

situations – what we might call “high risk/low attention.” (...)

Third, there is a broader set of countries and regions deserving of prevention efforts to mitigate the tensions that could give rise to atrocities, such as inter-ethnic disputes. (...)

The APB is now outlining capabilities we can bring to bear in all these situations. This includes an expansion of surveillance, including interchange with NGOs, UN officials and other actors on the ground. The APB is also ensuring that U.S. government agencies provide their on-the-ground personnel with adequate resources for assessment, planning, training, conflict prevention exercises or other needs.

USAID and Atrocity Prevention: Toolkits, Training and Technology:

(...) I’d like to take this opportunity to endorse a number of the other actions recommended in the Albright-Williamson report, including:

- New funding for crisis prevention and stabilization measures,
- Enhanced efforts with the UN and like-minded countries to strengthen the global capacity to

prevent atrocities,

- Greater APB outreach to civil society groups – now that I’m on this side of the table,
- New steps to improve ICC effectiveness to deter and prosecute war crimes, and
- Expanded engagement between the administration and Congress to ensure R2P implementation. (...)

Read the [full address](#) .

Read the Working Group on R2P’s report, [The United States and R2P: From Words to Action](#) .