

Picking the path of peace when we intervene overseas Roméo Dallaire with Andrew Coleman
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Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire is a Canadian senator and a Senior Fellow at the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies. He formerly served as Force Commander of UNAMIR, the UN peacekeeping force for Rwanda, between 1993 and 1994.

The Canadian government recently severed its diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. (...) But Iran has not seen 20,000 civilians (and counting) massacred within the last year, nor is it embroiled in a civil war that threatens to destabilize the entire region. That would be Syria. And while the crises are different, what is similar is our inability to produce a resolution.

That is why it is so difficult to answer the question, “Should Canada intervene to protect gross violations of human rights?” The obvious easy answer is “yes,” but that leads to a much more complex and nuanced question: “How should Canada intervene to protect?” (...)

We should not be forced to decide between the illusory choice of doing nothing or creating a firestorm. Neither position reflects the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, which supports the shielding of populations from mass atrocities (genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing); or the traditional Canadian approach to international peace and security.

R2P, a Canadian-led initiative, emerged from the human security framework, which places the protection of human rights at the centre of international peace and security. Human security is not focused only on genocide and mass atrocities; it deals with armed conflict and intervention, human rights and good governance, resources and the environment, and even organized crime.

Similarly, R2P is not only about military intervention. Quite the opposite: R2P was designed with the specific intention of moving away from humanitarian intervention, which is focused solely on the use of force, by promoting prevention. (...)

In practice, this means that the UN and its member states need to build their capacity to identify mass atrocities and their precipitating factors, and develop the tools necessary to address them before a situation such as Syria occurs.

For Canada, that means developing a prevention policy framework and the institutional capability to implement it. This is not achieved by increasing the level of rhetoric and the

adoption of empty slogans; it is done through careful and deliberate action. (...)

Two years ago, the Montreal Institute of Genocide Studies and Human Rights published a report entitled, Mobilizing the Will to Intervene. It analyzed past responses to mass atrocities and provided a set of recommendations for both the Canadian and American context, including making the prevention of mass atrocities a national security priority, the appointment of a senior member of cabinet for the prevention of mass atrocities, the creation of an interdepartmental coordinating office for the prevention of mass atrocities and an increase of Canada's diplomatic and development presence in fragile states.

(...) The Canadian government has not taken any steps towards implementing the recommendations. (...)

Should Canada intervene in situations where mass violations of human rights are occurring? Absolutely. Are we in a position to do so? Absolutely not.

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