

Brazil as a norm entrepreneur: the “Responsibility While Protecting”

initiative Thorsten Benner Global Public Policy Institute 4 March 2013 (...) The Responsibility While Protecting concept is one of the most promising initiatives to bridge the huge gaps in the global debate on the R2P.

It was an important discussion starter – and just when the discussion should have started to tackle the serious open questions, Brazil seems to have pulled the plug. Some of these open questions include how exactly the monitoring and accountability mechanisms in the Security Council can be conceived. In addition, there is the urgent need to develop the discussion on the use of force according to the third R2P pillar in order to better understand “how force can and should be used to protect civilians, and what kinds of operational tensions, legal dilemmas, and normative challenges arise from its use”.

Ensuring the implementation of R2P and RWP (in the sense of “doing the right thing, in the right place, at the right time and for the right reasons” in the words of the latest SG report) requires “knowledge, understanding and careful reflection”. (The report does not dare use the term “intelligence” which is a sensitive term for many touchy UN member states.) Investing in the knowledge capacity of the “international community” (chiefly the UN) should be an urgent priority but is neglected or even undermined by member states. In this context, Brazil could have used the RWP discussion to move forward debates on, for instance, the UN using intelligence from drones to better assess situations. These are discussions that have so far been mired in predictable ideological controversy.

However, given its reluctance to further push, the concept’s future hangs in the balance. Other countries such as Germany and the whole EU would be well advised to take up key elements of the concept and – in cooperation with the IBSA countries – revive the global debate with new ideas.

This is all the more urgent in light of the international community’s disastrous performance in the case of Syria. And both the West and Brazil should draw some broader lessons for global norm evolution from the RWP saga: Western capitals (and NGOs) should get used to the fact that they no longer hold a monopoly on norm entrepreneurship, and this should result in an openness to engage constructively with proposals on key global norms emanating from outside the

West. With the writing of geopolitical transition clearly on the wall, Western countries should recognize their almost automatic reflex to the Brazilian initiative and pause for introspection. For its part, Brazil will hopefully conduct an internal review and conclude that engaging in global norm entrepreneurship on balance is a business worth pursuing and investing in despite the inherent risks. The future of global governance depends on it. (...)

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