

What Can be Done to Protect Zimbabweans

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The **responsibility to protect (R2P)** norm, embraced universally at the world summit in New York in 2005, remains operationally elusive. Calls are growing for international intervention to lift the shroud of Robert Mugabe's ruinous reign from Zimbabwe's body politic. () All this because one aging tyrant would rather rule by thuggery than give up power. Mugabe gets ever more delusional, declaring the epidemic is over while blaming it as a conspiracy hatched in London to provide the pretext to invade. Neighboring Botswana expresses frustration. Kenya's Prime Minister Raila Odinga is urging the African Union to authorize emergency U.N. intervention to take control of the situation and ensure humanitarian assistance.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu calls for intervention under the **R2P** norm. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is appalled at our collective inability to deal with tyrants. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown says it is time for the bloodstained regime to be ousted.

#### **R2P**

holds that every state has the

#### **responsibility to protect**

all people inside its borders. When its failure to do so results in ethnic cleansing, war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide, world leaders promised in 2005, the international community, acting through the U.N. Security Council, will take "timely and decisive action." ()

The Security Council can launch investigations on its own or receive informal briefings from nongovernment organizations in the field. Unfortunately, as the Global Center for **R2P** notes, "the Council can never bring itself to act before a situation becomes catastrophic." ()

The recurring cycle is to urge and follow a wait-and-see policy until the bodies pile up in the streets and waterways, are shown graphically on worldwide TV, and a general wringing of hands ensues along with repeats of "never again." The alternative is to launch preventive action that is robust and effective in averting man-made tragedies. In retrospect, in our original **R2P** report we blurred the salient moral difference between incapacity and perpetration. Where states have the will but lack the capacity Afghanistan, Kosovo, East Timor, Nepal prevention measures can include humanitarian relief, economic assistance, rule-of-law and security sector reforms, and democratic institutional machinery.

But when despots inflict grave harm on their people, international prevention should cross the threshold from consensual to coercive measures. In Zimbabwe it should include broad global pressure, coordinated with regional organizations like the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU), in the form of targeted financial, educational and travel sanctions on all high-ranking officials and their families; their removal from all positions of authority in international institutions; arms embargoes; and the threat or actual referral of officials to the International Criminal Court.

Should these measures fail, as a last resort but only at the request and with the support of SADC and the AU, an international military intervention should be authorized. Making it time-bound and benchmarking progress will prevent it from turning into an occupying force. Zimbabwe's defense force is unlikely to offer formidable resistance. By refusing to sanction international intervention, African countries reinforce outside skepticism about their capacity for good governance as the key to lifting them out of conflicts, poverty and other pathologies. But without African backing an international intervention becomes a colonial enterprise. ()

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