

Lanka not an R2P case
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*Alexander Downer was Foreign Minister of Australia from 1996-2007. The following speech, in which he addresses **R2P** and the context of Sri Lanka, was delivered at the third annual Lakshman Kadirgamar Lecture (Colombo) entitled hanging World and Reform of the United Nations.*

() The UN is built on the foundations of national sovereignty. For many member states, national sovereignty is an absolute. Yet if the UN is to become truly effective, its members will have to recognise that in certain circumstances humanity is more important than sovereignty.

This has, in part, been already accepted by the adoption by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2005 of the doctrine of "**responsibility to protect**". At the heart of this doctrine is a simple proposition. All nations have national, sovereign rights but those rights bring with them responsibilities; responsibilities to look after their citizens' welfare not murder them. Under the doctrine of the **responsibility to protect**, in certain egregious situations the international community can justify the transgression of a nation's sovereignty. This is an important step forward but the ultimate test will come when the Security Council is required to take a real life decision, not just endorse a general principle. ()

My overall point is this. We live in an age of mass communications where the public, wherever they are, watch unfolding dramas and catastrophes on their television sets night after night. When they see horrific violence such as we saw in the Balkans right in front of their noses, they demand action. ()The new doctrine of **responsibility to protect** is as much born out of the information and communications revolution as it is a response to natural compassion for human suffering.

Some in Sri Lanka may view the doctrine of **responsibility to protect** with suspicion. Is this just an excuse for uninvited international intervention in the conflict between the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE? My answer to that is twofold. First, although the violence is disturbing it cannot by any stretch of the imagination be put in the same category as the mass killings and ethnic cleansing of the Balkans during the 1990s. The level of violence doesn't meet the benchmark needed to justify dramatic international action. ()

Secondly, uncalled for intervention is not necessarily going to make matters better. This is the important second condition for intervention. Mediators may be able to help but it would be a very special person who could come in from the outside world and fix your problems.

Reform of the Security Council and the evolution of the **responsibility to protect** are important changes needed to make the UN more effective..... ()

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