

The Responsibility to Protect after Libya and Syria Spencer Zifcak 2012 *Spencer Zifcak is a*
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At the United Nations World Summit in 2005, global political leaders endorsed a new doctrine to govern international political behaviour entitled the ‘responsibility to protect’. Pursuant to this doctrine, the nations of the world affirmed that the primary responsibility for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes rests with the sovereign state in which such crimes are anticipated or occurring. If, however, a state fails to exercise that responsibility, the international community may assume a corresponding duty to protect civilian populations from the commission of genocide and crimes against humanity. Only a short time later, in 2011, the international community was confronted with the prospect that large-scale civilian casualties may occur as a consequence of fighting between government and rebel forces in Libya. The UN Security Council, therefore, was confronted with the dilemma of whether to authorise an intervention to avert what seemed likely to be a humanitarian catastrophe. In this case, the UN Security Council sanctioned an intervention by NATO forces in accordance with the new doctrine. Soon after, the Syrian rebellion took hold and civilians began to be killed and injured in their thousands. In that case, however, the Security Council was paralysed. Neither sanctions nor military intervention could be agreed upon. In this article the Libyan and Syrian cases are analysed with a view to determining why the international community’s response to the two conflicts has been so different and what these differences tell us about the current standing and practice of the responsibility to protect doctrine. (...)

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