

R2P is a No-Go
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The role of Canada as a "norm entrepreneur" in international relations is justifiably hailed in discussions about world affairs. Concepts such as "human security" and "**Responsibility to Protect**" often abbreviated snappily as

R2P

, have been pioneered by Canada. It is, however, important to bear in mind that such concepts are viewed with hostility in much of the world and certainly play a minor role in the decision-making processes of most states, and for good reason.

Occasionally calls to mobilize Canada's diplomatic network in support of such notions reverberate through Ottawa. The current government is perceived as not incisive enough in the promotion of these "emerging" norms in international relations. ()

The fact that **R2P** is supposed to be implemented under the aegis of the UN Security Council reinforces the suspicions of many that **R2P** would turn into another tool by great powers to put pressure on weaker states. The ready invocation of **R2P**

by Russia after its invasion of Georgia in August 2008 did not do anything to allay these fears. This was one of the many steps that Russia has taken to reassert its influence in the former Soviet sphere as the balance of power shifted in its favour. It is a step that Russia would have taken anyway but it now had the handy "emerging norm" of

R2P

to buttress the legitimacy of its actions.

It is important to draw a basic distinction between the advocacy of human security and the promotion of responsibility to protect. In international relations theory these two concepts are often portrayed as sitting along a continuum. **R2P** is seen as a logical progression of the concept of human security.

In terms of advocacy however, the difference in impact of these concepts on Canada's international image, and consequently on Canada's capability to advance its interests, could not be sharper. () The promotion of **R2P** is an entirely different matter. It touches the concept of sovereignty, the cornerstone of the current international system. States and peoples in the global south guard their sovereignty jealously. This is not surprising given that it was often achieved after long struggles with colonial powers that kept meddling well after it was very clear that they were no longer welcome. ()

In many Muslim-majority countries such as Egypt, opposition to **R2P** is the only thing that unites the government and the Islamist opposition. Furthermore,

R2P

inevitably gives rise to double standards and hypocrisy. Most Arabs, for example, would view the failure to protect the civilian population in Gaza from Israeli incursions and blockades as a dereliction of western "

responsibility to protect

," no matter all the nuances of the legal debate or the Israeli desire to curb rocket attacks.

Conversely, in much of the world the emphasis on human rights abuses in Sudan is seen as a case of the West wanting to impose its values on a Muslim country and failing to understand the complexities of a conflict that has serious economic and political roots. Questions about double standards inevitably crop up: Why would **R2P** apply to Darfur and not other situations of mass human suffering?

Such concerns are brought into particular focus when we consider, for example, that the conflict in Congo has directly and indirectly claimed the lives of more than three million people since 1998 and yet it does not exert the same diplomatic urgency as the horrendous situation in Darfur. These concerns are inevitable when we try to cast an all-encompassing normative net to cover situations that are wildly different in nature and try to make them fit into criteria that can be twisted and turned.

The "first do no harm" principle is often invoked, as well it should be, by supporters of **R2P** to explain why even in their eyes it is not a good idea to exert more than a perfunctory protest over the actions of the Russian government in Chechnya. This implicitly recognizes balance of power as an important consideration and yet at the same time it hollows out the universality of a supposedly "legal" norm. ()

There is probably no harm in trying to dress up age-old political mediation, such as the one carried out by Kofi Annan in Kenya, as "**R2P**." This sort of intra-state political mediation by external actors has been taking place for hundreds of years. Canadian officials, though, should not be seen as advocating the establishment of a norm of humanitarian intervention in states of the global south under the rubric of **R2P**, something usually done, by the way, without specifying who exactly is going to carry out such intervention. ()

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