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The Middle East is a region with a varying degree of recognition and support for the Responsibility to Protect from governments, civil society groups and institutions such as the Arab League and the Islamic Conference. Debates on the norm have been plagued by the controversies surrounding the war in Iraq and the protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine, which came to a bloody watershed during the Israeli invasion of Gaza between December 2008 and January 2009. The rise of the Arab Spring in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and Libya, once again raised concern and debate regarding RtoP, specifically its implementation. The resolution and consequences of the crises in the region have yet to be seen and must continue to be monitored as they will have a strong impact on the future of RtoP and the prevention of mass atrocities.

I. RtoP in the Middle East *The 2003 Invasion of Iraq and RtoP* Some opponents of the norm have long argued that the illegal use of force in Iraq in 2003, and the early attempt by Prime Minister Blair and President Bush to justify the intervention as serving humanitarian purposes were examples of the potential danger and misuse of RtoP. However, many academics and politicians have since made clear that the invasion of Iraq in no way represented a proper case for the implementation of RtoP, nor an example of a response under the RtoP framework. While gross human rights violations occurred in Iraq in the 1980s and 1990s, these crimes were not occurring, nor likely to happen, at the time of the 2003 military intervention, thus failing to meet the basic criteria legitimizing the consideration of 'RtoP crimes' in this situation. Nor were peaceful measures exhausted before the consideration of military force, another pre-requisite under RtoP as spelled out in the 2005 World Summit. Lastly, while RtoP restricts the use of force by the Security Council under Ch. VII, in accordance with the UN Charter, the invasion itself was illegal as it occurred by a 'coalition of the willing' led by the United States, with the absence of UN Security Council authorization.

Regional Developments Since the 2005 World Summit

Middle Eastern governments voiced their support, as well as opposition, for RtoP at the 2005 World Summit, in the semi-annual

[Open Debates of the Security Council on the Protection of Civilians](#)

, and before the General Assembly's 2009 Debate and 2010 Interactive Dialogue on RtoP.

Lebanon, United Arab Emirates and Palestine voiced support of RtoP during the Open Debates on the Protection of Civilians. Jordan has been a strong advocate for RtoP, as indicated by Crown Prince El Hassan bin Talal's involvement as a patron with the

[Global Centre for Responsibility to Protect](#)

While Qatar appreciates the "noble humanitarian value" and agrees with the basic principles of

the Responsibility to Protect, Qatar representative Mr. Jamal Nasser Al-Bader warned that states and the UN “should be cautious” to prevent the norm from being “exploited and abused”.

Egypt and Pakistan have been very vocal in their opposition to RtoP. Their unwillingness to support the new international norm primarily lies with their insistence on the concept of absolute sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention. For instance, Pakistan insisted on an “affirmation of non-interference, national sovereignty and territorial integrity”.

For more information on the positions of Middle Eastern governments please visit our [Government](#) page and the [UN and the Responsibility to Protect](#) page.

II. The Crisis in Gaza (27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009)

A breakdown of the cease-fire and a military offensive between Israel and Hamas sparked a crisis in which both sides were accused of violating human rights law and international humanitarian law. Once more, civilians were the vast majority of casualties and, [according to the UN](#), the crisis claimed over 1,300 lives, 412 of them children, and wounded more than 5,450 people, 1,855 of them children. According to the Human Rights Watch report, [Deprived and Endangered: Humanitarian Crisis in the Gaza Strip](#), Gaza civilians faced dire shortages of food, water, cooking gas, fuel and medical care; electricity, water and sewage infrastructure. Amnesty International researchers in Gaza reported many [cases](#) of “unwarranted attacks on defenseless civilians, many of them children.” Months after the end of the military offensive, the dire humanitarian situation continued. According to Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in a [statement](#) issued on 8 June 2009, nothing beyond basic needs such as food and medicine was allowed into Gaza nearly 5 months after the end of the conflict. Essential recovery efforts and long-term development initiatives were impossible in these conditions.

The escalation of violence in Gaza raised serious questions about using RtoP to urge international action to protect civilians in the conflict. RtoP has been referred to, notably by [Richard Falk](#), UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but also by others who claim that crimes committed in Gaza have reached the threshold of RtoP crimes. Falk called into question the implementation of RtoP in Libya in an April 2011

[opinion piece](#)

for Al-Jazeera, stating that action was taken to protect Libyan civilians, however a similar response was absent as a measure to aid the people of Gaza. Indiscriminate killings of civilians and the use of civilians as human shields led several governments and civil society organizations to accuse both Israel and Hamas of committing war crimes. There remain questions as to the extent to which these crimes were widespread and systematic, arguably a determining factor for whether the RtoP threshold for an international response was met. In addition, questions remained as to whether invoking RtoP would have brought the desired changes to protect civilians in this deeply politicized situation.

For further information please visit our

[Crisis in Gaza](#)

page.

III. Humanitarian Crisis and Civil War in Libya

Political protests demanding an end to Muammar Gaddafi's 41-year reign

[began](#)

on February 15, 2011 in the capital of Tripoli and spread across the North African state, ultimately descending into a civil war and humanitarian crisis. The government of Libya responded forcefully by dispatching the national army to crush the unrest. The indiscriminate and widespread use of force by the government against the Libyan population clearly turned the situation into one where human rights violations constituted crimes against humanity, one of the crimes included in the RtoP framework. The international community, including regional organizations, swiftly responded to the deteriorating situation.

The African Union

(AU), in a 10 March 2011

[communiqué](#)

[denounced](#)

the violence in Libya and called for the creation of

[a High-Level Committee on Libya](#)

to engage with all parties and facilitate dialogue. The AU, however, expressly rejected any form of foreign military intervention; a position which varied from those taken by regional bodies such as the Arab League or Gulf Cooperation Council. On 25 May 2011 the AU Assembly released its [Decision on the Peaceful Resolution of the Libyan Crisis](#)

which expressed its "concern at the dangerous precedence being set by one-sided interpretations of these resolutions, in an attempt to provide a legal authority for military and other actions on the ground that are clearly outside the scope of these resolutions and at the resulting negative impact on the efforts aimed at building an international order based on legality." The AU recalled that African states are those that bear the impact of the Libyan conflict

and expressed “surprise and disappointment at the attempts to marginalize the continent.”

The Arab League

took a strong position against the use of force by the Gaddafi regime, and at a meeting on March 3 suspended Libya from the League and began to

[consider](#)

imposing a ‘no-fly zone’. On 12 March 2011 the

[Arab League](#)

convened an extraordinary session and “called on the Security Council to bear its responsibilities...and to take the necessary measures to impose immediately a no-fly zone” as well as take measures to protect the population “while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighboring States”.

The Gulf Cooperation Council,

which met on 7 March 2011, also

[called](#)

on the “UN Security Council take all necessary measures to protect civilians, including enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya”, and condemned the “crimes committed against civilians, the use of heavy arms and the recruitment of mercenaries” by the Libyan regime.

The initial support by Middle Eastern regional organizations for the implementation of a no-fly zone quickly faded following the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 and the subsequent military campaign launched by states including France and the US, which was ultimately overtaken by NATO. The Arab League

[spoke out](#)

against the NATO airstrikes and declared that the campaign differed greatly from the no-fly zone initially desired to protect civilians from Gaddafi’s forces. The shift in support by the Arab League and other regional organizations, , highlights the concerns and debates that arose in the aftermath of Resolution 1973 and the actions of NATO Member States as to whether NATO’s actions overreach the implementation of a no-fly zone, and if the military force being executed protects civilians from further crimes.

For more information please visit our

[Crisis in Libya](#)

page.

IV. Civil Society and the Further for RtoP in the Middle East

It was suggested, at the March 2009

[FRIDE conference](#)

on the implementation of the responsibility to protect, “the Middle East, and Gaza specifically, would be a useful testing ground for R2P.” However, the implementation of the norm in the Middle East region is ridden with obstacles. Many states in the Middle East view the emerging norm with distrust, suspecting it to be another Western tool for humanitarian intervention.

In addition, according to the

[report](#)

from the FRIDE conference, impediments in the way of successfully implementing RtoP include: “the chasm between rulers and the ruled; restrictions or absence altogether of the media (for example, the recent media blackout during the Israeli invasion of Gaza); the relative inexperience of regional organizations like the Arab League or the Islamic Conference as decision-making bodies in terms of regional responses; and the relatively unsophisticated nature of civil society.”

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the religious culture in the Middle East emphasizes on “protecting one’s fellow man,” which may be conducive to the basic principles of the Responsibility to Protect. While these values may not directly transform into political action, given the many obstacles, it may facilitate positive responses to the fundamental concepts of the norm.

Below please find reports and statements by civil society. As information from the region is limited we welcome any additional information on events, reports, panels, etc. that focus on issues related to RtoP, conflict prevention, and enhancing regional and civil society capabilities.

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The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

published its fourth annual report, “

[***Fractured Walls, New Horizons***](#)

,” on 6 June 2012 which

addresses the repercussions of the Arab Spring throughout the region

, concluding that the achievements of revolution were not as successful as expected by movement leaders. The report concludes that rebuilding efforts have not fulfilled their potential and available options for in most Arab countries is limited to reforms of old regimes or the establishment of a theocracy.

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The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

(CIHRS) published its third annual report, “

[***Roots of unrest in the Arab World***](#)

,” on 29 March 2011 documenting the state of human rights throughout the region. The report discusses the

primary roots of unrest, including a deteriorating role of human rights, a lack of political will to advance human rights, poor legislation, perpetuating impunity and immunity, and use of states of emergency

- **The US Institute of Peace**

, through its

Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention

, conducts

research, publishes documents, and hosts events

relating to the issues and concerns regarding various conflict zones.

Middle Eastern countries

, including Libya, Lebanon, and Iran, are amongst the states under close examination by researchers at the Center. Resources and information on the various projects and papers are available at the Center's

[website](#)

, which was most recently updated in June 2011.

- **Search for Common Ground**

hosted a meeting as part of its Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum on 10 May 2011 entitled From

[***Revolution to Democracy Lessons for Political Transitions in the Middle East and North Africa***](#)

. The forum examined the various

factors that influenced the calls for democracy in the region

and panelists discussed the

effect of Middle Eastern history

on the crises.

- **Human Rights Watch**

issued a press release on 27 April 2011 entitled

[***Arab States should push for End to Killings***](#)

which called on states and regional bodies, such as the Arab League, to

endorse calls for the establishment of an international inquiry

into government-led violence in Syria

and to implement measures, such as travel bans, to

discourage continued violence

- On February 22, 2011, [Amnesty International](#) called on the **Arab League** and the Security Council to take action to **investigate human rights violations** in Libya, as well as for the League to **dispatch investigators** to the country.

- In March 2009, **FRIDE** hosted a conference on the [Responsibility to Protect: Translating Ideas into Capacity](#), which included a brief discussion on **the implementation of and obstacles facing RtoP in the Middle East**