

Responsibility to protect: translating ideas into capacity Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior
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Despite the endorsement of the RtoP principles at the 2005 World Summit, the implementation of the emerging international norm has proven to be problematic as the RtoP norm continues to be viewed with suspicion by some countries, perceiving it as a tool for Western powers to justify intervention. On 9-10 March 2009, the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) and Intermón Oxfam, with the cooperation of the Canadian and British Embassies in Spain, brought together a number of experts to discuss RtoP and its implementation, what can be done to facilitate that process, what obstacles it faces, and what RtoP's prospects are as an international norm of the future.

Excerpts from the conclusion:

(...) R2P faces accusations from its detractors, who argue it is just the latest instrument devised to further the agenda of the West, and also from skeptics, who argue that intervention might encourage secessionism and incite an increase in violence from armed groups. These accusations need to be addressed, firstly, by using the norm fairly and without double standards, which may require a reform of the UN Security Council, and, secondly, by adapting the norm to local contexts and not using it in incorrect settings (i.e. Iraq, Georgia, Burma).

The protection of civilians has become an increasingly complex and difficult activity for the state and international community – international missions with unclear mandates, a focus on staff security, a blurring of the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, the militarization of humanitarian spaces. Protection objectives will never be fully achieved if the International Community only addresses immediate threats and fails to address the structural causes of conflicts (arms trade, resource driven conflicts, etc.)

The preventive aspect of R2P is its most important dimension: it curtails human suffering before it takes place and has won round some of those nations skeptical of R2P. But protection also contains the potential to dilute the importance and conceptual clarity of the norm, particularly if we raise the threshold for intervention too high, include too many structural aspects or fail to define the most effective elements for prevention.

In terms of response, external (military) intervention is the most controversial aspect of R2P and always a last resort. Policy makers and politicians making the decision to intervene should weigh up the impact on the media and public opinion. It is also important to use the same rule for intervention in all cases and have a clear plan with political objectives as well as an exit strategy.

Reconstruction should not be contemplated as a return to the starting point of a post-conflict society. The International Community should take the opportunity to tackle the structural causes of conflict (socio-economic inequalities, impunity and injustice) using local capacities as well as long-term external assistance. In this regard, the UN Peace building Commission should be given an appropriate mandate and resources to lead this task.

Regional organizations, such as the EU and AU, can play a prominent role in the implementation of R2P. The EU is particularly well placed to push the R2P agenda forward, with a priority being to form its own rapid civilian deployment capacity.

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