

World leaders must call R2P what it is

Lloyd Axworthy and Allan Rock Ottawa Citizen 2 March 2011 *Lloyd Axworthy is president of the University of Winnipeg and a former Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Allan Rock is president of the University of Ottawa and a former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations.*

In 2005, United Nations member states unanimously adopted a set of principles called the **Responsibility to Protect, or R2P**

. Shamed by its inaction in the Rwandan genocide and its late and limited response in Kosovo, the international community committed to protect populations facing mass atrocity when their own governments are unable or unwilling to protect them.

Rejecting arguments that governments in sovereign states have the absolute right to do as they please within their own borders, the world's leaders drew the line at mass murder. They endorsed a continuum of escalating responses from political condemnation, to sanctions and embargoes and, ultimately -in rare and extreme cases -to military intervention.

The international response to the crisis in Libya illustrates

R2P

in action: the world is telling Moammar Gadhafi that it will not stand idly by and watch him massacre his own people. The Security Council, in the first stage of the

R2P

process, has now imposed a range of preliminary measures to send that message and to set the stage for additional action if necessary.

Regrettably, neither the Security Council nor U.S. President Barack Obama has expressly referred to the

R2P

resolution as the intellectual framework within which these responses are situated. That is a missed opportunity on several counts. First and most importantly, should the council eventually be asked to authorize the use of force, the case may be more difficult if that is the first time

R2P

is mentioned. Second, here is a chance to demonstrate that

R2P

is not just about sending armies across borders, as many of its critics contend. Rather, it seeks to pressure in various ways. Military intervention is the last resort after all other measures have failed. The international response in Libya will demonstrate that more powerfully, provided the early measures are expressly linked to

R2P.

There are other reasons why it is important to invoke

R2P

in this case. The doctrine provides a coherent framework against which to evaluate options should the crisis worsen. Seeing the Security Council's actions last Saturday as the first step in

an
R2P
response encourages a disciplined analysis of those options measured against the principles adopted in 2005. Furthermore, the impact of the measures imposed last Saturday is diminished if they are seen as isolated responses rather than the first points on a continuum that will lead, if necessary, to much more serious consequences.

Canada has a special connection to

R2P
. The Canadian government sponsored the international commission that conceived of the doctrine, and Canadian diplomats led the effort that resulted in its adoption. Canada should therefore play a prominent role in preparing for what might come during the next few uncertain weeks in Libya, including the "worst-case scenario."(...)

See full
[article](#)