MEANING OF SECURITY IN CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL POLITICS: THE CASE STUDY OF THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT IN IRAQ

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# Introduction

In contemporary global politics, peace continues to be a closely guarded phenomenon. It is an issue of concern for every global citizen. However, for the most part, peace has remained elusive. In recent years, the debate on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) has been inspired by the need to ensure that states do not continue disturbing peace while hiding under claims of the right to operate as sovereign states.

When the United Nations introduced the R2P initiative, the objective was to create a formidable framework for humanitarian intervention. This initiative was guided by the understanding that military intervention is a reality in the current understanding of security in global politics. In the current understanding, sovereignty is taken as a responsibility to protect citizens and not a right to violate their fundamental human rights.

The aim of this paper is to examine the meaning of security in contemporary global politics. In this analysis, focus is on the case study of The Responsibility to Protect in Iraq. The paper highlights the problems being encountered before providing possible solutions. The first problem is that it has become increasingly difficult for consensus to be built around R2P. The second problem is the persistent failure by R2P to provide extra-political will to prevent atrocity crimes. Thirdly, in the post-Iraq era, the international community has become too cautious on issues of intervention to the point where atrocity crimes have been allowed to happen, for example, in Darfur. R2P failed miserably in Darfur because of its muted response to the crisis.

The paper proposes five solutions. First, the R2P should be promoted as a platform where efforts are made to reconsider the collective international security regime that has always provided a basis for the operations of the UN since 1945. Secondly, the provisions of responsibility to protect can be used to promote reunion in war-torn countries such as Iraq. Thirdly, R2P should be promoted as an emerging legal norm; however, sovereignty should be maintained as the main source of perceptions of security among states. Fourthly, international actors should focus on improving efficiency in humanitarian intervention. Lastly, in an environment where R2P norms are weak and heavily contested, regional bodies such as the EU (European Union), NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), and UN have a critical role to play in creating an enabling environment in which a strong legal norm for R2P can emerge.

# The problems

## Difficulties in building consensus around R2P

The meaning of security seems to be changing in response to the dynamics of today’s political environment. For example, the notion of R2P seems to have been deeply affected by the multilateralism being exhibited in US politics. Bellamy (2008, p. 615) observes that one of the greatest challenges for global peace and security entails “translating words into actions”. These words were recently echoed by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in reference to the problems being encountered in efforts to resolve humanitarian crises (Bellamy 2008, p. 615).

Although the R2P doctrine is acceptable, it is not clear how best it should be implemented. Military interventions have in many instances triggered condemnation from different countries because of the way they are being implemented (Weiss 2004, p. 146). A classical case is that of the US war on terror in Iraq. This war triggered international disquiet because of the way the US-led forces went on to topple Saddam Hussein’s government without confirming the existence of weapons of mass destruction in the country.

The issue of whether military intervention is a necessary and viable option continues to dominate discussions on the meaning of security in today’s global politics. During the Darfur crisis, Jodie Williams, who headed mission of the Human Rights Council in the region, used the concept of R2P to assess the performance of the government of Sudan. On this basis, Williams criticized the government of Sudan for “manifestly failing” as far as its responsibility to protect the country’s citizens (Bellamy 2008, p. 618). The R2P principle was also adopted by the Security Council when it mandated a humanitarian mission in Darfur under the name UNAMID (UN–African Union hybrid mission for Darfur). Moreover, both Ban Ki-Moon and Koffi Annan relied on R2P in resolving the post-election violence in Kenya (Bellamy 2008, p. 615).

Although R2P continues to be promoted by the UN, it has also attracted widespread international criticism. For example, a section of the Human Rights Council, especially Asian and Arab members, denounced the Williams Report. Moreover, some countries seem to have started backtracking from the R2P principle by arguing that they never endorsed it in the first place. These countries claim that they only agreed to deliberate further on its provisions.

The complex nature of global politics has made it difficult for consensus to be built around the principles of R2P. These problems arise mainly because the relationship between non-consensual military intervention and R2P is yet to be properly defined. Many governments hold the view that R2P is simply a sophisticated way through which humanitarian intervention is legitimized. A major concern is that R2P “legitimizes” or “legalizes” military intervention without authorization from the UN Security Council. These concerns have led some supporters of R2P to support efforts to establish a new norm through which humanitarian intervention can be legalized. Without such a norm, R2P may continue to be associated with efforts by governments to attempt to win the support of the international community in the pursuit of coercive interference.

## Failure by R2P to provide extra-political will to prevent atrocity crimes: The Case of Iraq

In contemporary global politics, a lot of weight is accorded to the debate on how to prevent genocide and atrocity crimes. Against the backdrop of this debate, discourse on the relevance of R2P has emerged. According to Bellamy (2010, p. 157), R2P has failed in the objective of providing extra-political will for the prevention of atrocity crimes. This is evident in the insecurity being experienced in contemporary global politics as well as in the Iraqi situation (Bellamy 2010, p. 157).

It is disheartening to observe the lack of extra-political will, given that in 2005 heads of state and government unanimously adopted the R2P during the UN World Summit of 2005. During this summit, it was agreed that states have the responsibility to protect their respective populations from war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. They also agreed that the international community has a responsibility to help individual states fulfill their R2P. Moreover, it was agreed that the international community is responsible for taking timely action in a decisive manner as provided for in the UN Charter whenever a state manifestly fails to protect its citizens from any of the aforementioned crimes.

Despite this progress, disagreement still exists. Critics of R2P insist that this doctrine is dangerous in that it easily promotes imperialism while undermining the political autonomy and national sovereignty of weak states. It is also argued that proponents of this doctrine are simply engaging in rhetoric posturing disguised as a promise to protect vulnerable populations. The critics often point out the case of Iraq, where the US-led invasion was conducted on the basis of claims that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s administration had developed weapons of mass destruction. After the invasion, it emerged that no such weapons existed.

Critics of the R2P have also decried the lack of skills and charisma on the part of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in negotiating withgovernments that have a history of human rights violations. Similarly, the UN has been accused of focusing too much on rhetoric at the expense of performance. As part of this rhetoric, the secretary general decided to hire an advisor on R2P affairs as well as embrace the recommendations presented to him by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). Moreover, the UN is keen to be seen to be evaluating the performance of sovereign states to ensure that the implementation of R2P is restricted to the framework that was created in 2005.

## Lack of Caution in Iraq War

In the US invasion of Iraq, one of the greatest flaws was a lack of caution on the part of all relevant parties, including the UN. This war demonstrated that we live in a dangerous world where a sovereign state can abuse its privileged position as a global power and invade another sovereign state in the pretext of the war on terror. As one would expect, the politics of the post-Iraq era was dominated by efforts to ensure that sovereign states exercised more caution during humanitarian interventions. This is indeed what has happened. The R2P protocol was adopted in the wake of this invasion.

According to Bellamy (2005, p. 32), the future of humanitarian intervention took a different course following the US-led invasion of Iraq. In spite of efforts to ensure that genocides do not recur, response to the Darfur crisis by the international community has largely been a muted one. Perhaps the most significant effort was made by the US in 2004 when the then secretary of state Collin Powell, in an unprecedented move, termed the Darfur crisis as genocide. By 2005, an underfunded African Union Mission (AMIS) had already been deployed in Darfur (Bellamy 2005, p. 32). This mission proved to unable to stop sporadic violence in the region from escalating into a full-blown civil war. Bellamy (2005, p. 32) argues that the muted response to the Darfur genocide was occasioned by the outpouring of criticism against the US because of the way it handled the Iraq War. The standing of the US has been greatly undermined in the post-Iraq era. According to Bellamy (2005, p. 33), this has led to an international clamor for new norms of humanitarian intervention.

According to Moses, Bahador, & Wright (2011, p. 361), R2P was abused in Iraq, and this has impacted negatively on subsequent humanitarian interventions. In the post-Iraq era, the international community has adopted a cautious approach in the way it has been engaging with the Darfur crisis. The way the Iraq war unfolded and the role that the US and the United Kingdom played provide a good picture of what security means in the contemporary global politics.

The governments of United Kingdom and the United States endeavored to sell the idea of War in Iraq to the world in general and the Iraqi people in particular. They used rhetorical justifications to invade Iraq. The security narrative constituted one of the justifications for war. In this dimension, the US and UK governments claimed that Iraq was undermining international law and that the state was a global threat by possessing weapons of mass destruction. In the humanitarian justification, the two governments claimed that the Iraqi people were undergoing terrible suffering and their there was an urgent need to liberate them.

The rhetoric that culminated in the Iraq war has greatly contributed to differences of opinions regarding what really constitutes humanitarian intervention. As Moses, Bahador, & Wright (2011, p. 361) point out, it has become increasingly difficult for advocates of R2P to agree on the situations that warrant humanitarian intervention. Moreover, the R2P advocates are keen to distance the R2P project from the justifications that the US and the UK used to invade Iraq. There are two main reasons why the advocates have adopted this stance. The first one is the damage caused to the reputation of the US and the US following this invasion. Secondly, months before the invasion, the US and the UK started giving wide publicity and exposure to speeches that promoted humanitarian narratives as a way of creating the impression that the invasion needed to be treated as a matter of urgency. According to Williams & Bellamy (2005, p. 31), the muted response to the Darfur crisis occurred because the leading global powers were reluctant to risk having their standing undermined even further following a messy “military adventures” in Iraq and Afghanistan.

# Possible Solutions

A number of solutions have been suggested by different researchers in efforts to create a better meaning of security in contemporary global politics, particularly in light of R2P in the post-Iraq era. Chandler (2004, p. 60) suggests that the R2P project should be imposed in an environment of “liberal conceptions of peace”. This way, the dream reconsidering the collective international security that the UN Charter regime has been discussing since 1945 may come true. Such a solution may double up as an opportunity for the international community to reform the international legal framework upon which the operations of the UN are founded.

For the new norm to be enforceable, it must be compatible with the prevailing doctrine of sovereignty. In fact, the need to avoid derailing efforts to reconsider the prevailing framework for global security greatly contributed to the preference for “responsibility to protect” over “right to intervene” (Chandler 2004, p. 61). Such a choice of words should be reinforced in order to avoid creating a scenario where attention is focused on the rights, prerogatives, and clams of the intervening states instead of the urgent needs and problems of potential beneficiaries.

Other than the issue of compatibility, there is also a need for the thorny question of reunion in war-torn countries to be addressed. By pursuingthe R2P project with this goal in mind, future conflicts can be avoided. Evans & Sahnoun (2002, p. 99) gives the example of Iraq, where a long-term solution needs to be sought with a view to build an environment of sustainability with regard to peace and stability. According to Evans & Sahnoun (2002, 100), the international community handled the numerous demands arising from the quest for “humanitarian intervention” in a messy way.

According to Stahn (2007, p. 117), R2P should be strengthened as a legal norm although the idea of sovereignty should still be maintained as the main source of perception of security among states. Sovereign states need to feel that they are not under a perpetual risk of invasion by a foreign country simply because of some misunderstanding, or worse, because of political machinations like in the case of Iraq (Stahn 2007, p. 117). Stahn (2007, p. 101) points out that R2P should be viewed as a multifaceted concept, whereby various elements should contribute to efforts to determine the point at which sovereign states neglect their responsibility to protect their citizens. This calls for the establishment of a clearly defined criteria on the basis of which a decision to intervene militarily can be made.

Although the concept of R2P enjoys support from many sovereign states, the UN, and civil society, the documents that outline its mode of operation seem to be giving different versions of how it should be developed into a legal norm (Stahn 2007, 101). For this reason, Stahn (2007, p. 118) makes five propositions that may guide the development of this concept. The first proposition is that it is the duty of the host state to provide all citizens on its territory. Secondly, states that fail in their duty to protect have a weak defense of sovereignty. Thirdly, it may be possible for foreign entities to intervene in a “non-forcible” manner. The fourth proposition, which tends to be more controversial, is that foreign states may be compelled to intervene forcibly. Lastly, foreign entities have a positive responsibility to act. Unfortunately, in this last proposition, there is less agreement among actors in international politics.

Controversy surrounding R2P can also be solved if countries that are supportive of the idea of humanitarian intervention fiercely pursue the goal of efficiency in ensuring that the responsibility to protect the fundamental human rights is not mired up in political machinations of the day. In the case of Iraq, the US and the UK governments brought in a political dimension to invade a sovereign country. They pretended to be protecting the Iraqi people from the misery of poor governance of Saddam Hussein. In reality, there were far-reaching political goals that needed to be achieved through that war. This unfortunate turn of events unfold at a time when the world is looking for new ways of ensuring that sovereign states do not overstep their mandate by violating the rights of their citizens. By invading Iraq, the US government gave critics of R2P some new reasons to oppose any efforts to intervene militarily in a sovereign state. The invasion created the impression that weak states were no longer safe to conduct their own business without fear of interference by powerful states.

As Thakur (2005, p. 118) points out, the widening of North-South divide should be addressed even as the world ponders over the best way of dealing with rogue states that violate the fundamental human rights of their citizens through mass killings, genocides, and atrocity crimes. To deal with these problems, it may be important for the world to look at the life experiences and historical narratives that have informed the process of state formation. As actors in international politics attempt to save at-risk populations, they must also be cautious not to take actions that may pose a threat to the very existence of entire states. In other words, international actors must focus on improving efficiency in humanitarian intervention (Thakur 2005, p. 119). They must refrain from distorting the understanding of crucial international issues.

Lastly, in an environment where R2P norms are weak and heavily contested, regional bodies such as the EU (European Union), NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), and UN still have an important role to play in projecting regional and international perspectives. These perspectives are crucial if the R2P project is to be strengthened as an international legal norm. In a world where the South is more interested in justice within nations than among nations, a regional perspective may be important.

It may also be worthwhile to point out that most of the at-risk populations tend to be in the South. The risk tends to be aggravated by conditions of underdevelopment. Therefore, it may be essential for Westerners to put into consideration economic dimensions when assessing the ability by sovereign states to address threats faced by specific populations. The economic dimension may fall into place through non-military intervention. For example, a resource-based conflict that threatensto blow up to genocidal proportions may be averted if the warring communities were given access to more economic opportunities.

# Conclusion

From the discussion presented in this paper it is evident that rules of engagement made in the R2P should be reconsidered to avoid messy humanitarian interventions such as the one that occurred during the Iraq invasion. The UN should be in the forefront in promoting R2P and transforming it into a strong legal norm. In this undertaking, there is a need for balance to be maintained to ensure that the new norm is compatible with the doctrine of sovereignty. Moreover, emphasis should be on the responsibility by the international community to protect communities under high risk of atrocity crimes. The idea of the right to intervene should not be promoted because it creates the impression that one sovereign state is seeking to take conquer another sovereign state.

In conclusion, the meaning of security in contemporary global politics should be understood in the context of the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect. Today, all sovereign states are assumed to have the responsibility of ensuring their all their citizens are protected from war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. In contemporary global politics, security is defined on the basis of three elements. The first element is the ability by sovereign states to protect their citizens from human rights abuses. The second element is the ability by the international community to intervene militarily for the sole objective of preventing the perpetuation of violence and human rights violations in a sovereign state. The third element is the ability by sovereign states to shelf their vested national interests before, during, and after the humanitarian intervention, such that they do not seem to be taking advantage of weaker states that are embroiled in conflicts for imperialist gains.

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