



**From Humanitarian
Intervention to
Responsibility to Protect:
Between Ethics and
Realpolitik**

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Abstract

This article examines the evolution of humanitarian intervention into the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) by focusing on its ethical foundations and political realities that surround its implementation. While post-Cold War optimism anticipated a more peaceful international order, the persistence of mass atrocity crimes challenged the global community to respond and gave rise to the contested practices of humanitarian intervention, triggering the search for a new normative ground in the form of R2P. Based on the just war tradition, the article analyzes core ethical principles as applied to R2P, which include just cause, right intention, legitimate authority, proportionality, last resort, and reasonable prospect of success. Demonstrating how moral imperatives may often collide with geopolitical interests, the article concludes that R2P represents a significant innovation in the international normative order, but, in practice, when confronted with the interests of powerful states, its ethical foundations become fragile.

Keywords: *Intervention, Ethics, Humanitarian intervention, Responsibility to Protect.*

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İnsani Müdahaleden Koruma Sorumluluğuna: Etik ile Gerçekçilik Arasında Özet

Bu makale, insani müdahaleden Koruma Sorumluluğu (R2P) doktrinine evrimi, etik temellerine ve uygulanmasını çevreleyen real-politik ortama odaklanarak incelemektedir. Soğuk Savaş sonrası iyimserlik daha barışçıl bir uluslararası düzen öngörürken, kitlesel vahşet suçlarının devam etmesi küresel toplumu buna bir karşılık üretmeye zorlamış ve sonuçta insani müdahalenin tartışmalı uygulamalarına yol açarak R2P biçimine evrilen bir normatif zemin arayışını tetiklemiştir. Makale, adil savaş geleneğine dayanarak, R2P’de uygulanan temel etik ilkeleri, yani meşru neden, doğru niyet, meşru otorite, orantılılık, son çare ve başarı için makul beklenti ilkelerini analiz etmektedir. Ahlaki zorunlulukların genellikle jeopolitik çıkarlarla çelişebileceğini gösteren makale, R2P’nin uluslararası normatif düzende önemli bir yeniliği temsil ettiğini tespit etmekte, ancak uygulamada, güçlü devletlerin çıkarlarıyla karşılaştığında etik temellerinin kırılgan hale geldiği sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Müdahale, Etik, İnsani Müdahale, Koruma Sorumluluğu.*

Introduction

In the immediate post-Cold War era, while there was great optimism for a more prosperous, free, democratic, and peaceful world, the period was instead marked by intra-state conflicts, crimes against humanity, and genocides that called for international action. In a unipolar world order, dominated by Western powers who had the will and capacity to intervene in the name of “saving strangers,” the question of humanitarian intervention has become one of the central issues in international relations (Wheeler, 2000). While there was no disagreement on condemning mass atrocity crimes and attributing responsibility to the international community to protect vulnerable populations from severe human rights violations, there were significant divergences in practice. In an effort to bridge differences by constructing a solid legal basis for humanitarian interventions, the concept of “responsibility to protect” (R2P) was put forward, which has evolved into an “emerging norm” and gained widespread international recognition in a remarkably short time. It wasn’t until the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 responding to the humanitarian crisis in Libya that R2P was explicitly referred to in a legal document as a justification for the use of force (United Nations Security Council, 2011). This was the first and the last UN-sanctioned use of force referring to R2P, which marked the end of global consent amid the accusations made by Russia and China that intervening Western forces overstepped the UN Security Council mandate. Such a collapse of global consensus has led not only to debates over the legality of R2P but also to questions about its ethical foundations. This article, after examining humanitarian intervention and R2P in general terms, will discuss the ethical foundations of both concepts with reference to just cause, right intention, legitimate authority, proportionality, last resort, and the prospect for success.

Humanitarian intervention: A contested concept and practice

Intervention has been a constant feature of international relations. It is defined as “dictatorial or coercive interference by an outside party or parties in the sphere of jurisdiction of a sovereign state” (Bull, 1984: 1). The essential components of intervention are the aim, that is, to change the behaviour of the target state, and the means, that is, the use or threat to use force. As such, it does not involve any form of self-defense, and, therefore, its legality and legitimacy cannot be claimed. Yet, in response to massive humanitarian crises, inspired by just war theories, it is often asked if intervention can be used for humanitarian purposes (Prat & Saxon 2015). Fusing intervention with humanitarianism, Knudsen views humanitarian intervention as “a dictatorial or coercive interference in the sphere of jurisdiction of a sovereign state motivated or legitimated by humanitarian concern” (Knudsen, 1997: 146). Similarly, Welsh defines humanitarian intervention as a “coercive interference in the internal affairs of a state, involving the use of armed forces, with the purpose of addressing massive human rights violations or preventing widespread human suffering” (Welsh, 2004: 3). Here, both scholars add another component to the definition of intervention, that is, humanitarian motivation. For a humanitarian intervention to claim legitimacy, or a reasonable justification to practice the “right to intervene,” the intervening parties should have no other considerations (i.e., economic, political, strategic, etc.) other than saving lives in grave danger.

Yet, the introduction and first utilization of the concept of humanitarian intervention as a just cause by European great powers throughout the 19th century contradicts the conventional wisdom that the only motivation for a humanitarian intervention must be to “save strangers” (Weiss & Collins, 1996: 17). The first such example of justifying military intervention with humanitarian considerations was towards the Ottoman Empire, which European powers accused of actively persecuting its Christian minority (Rodogno, 2012). The

European powers were highly selective about what constituted a violation of the “right to life,” and humanitarian interventions did not occur unless they coincided with their perceived national interests.

Despite its contentious nature and the controversial practices of states from the 19th century onwards, many legal scholars argue that humanitarian intervention is part of international customary law. For them, Article 56 of the United Nations Charter calls for joint and collective action to protect universal respect for human rights, and Chapter VII of the Charter should also be invoked in cases of humanitarian catastrophes (Murphy, 1996). The opponents, however, point to Article 2(4) and 2(7) of the UN Charter, asserting that they explicitly prohibit humanitarian intervention and establish sovereignty as the governing norm of international relations. Due to legal and political controversies surrounding humanitarian intervention, the concept remained highly contested. Yet, the emergence of humanitarian crises in the post-Cold War era constituted pressing issues to be addressed by the international community. This was emphasized by Jackson:

Today, for the first time in history, how a sovereign state treats its own citizens is no longer a matter for its own exclusive determination, but a matter of legitimate concern for all states and their inhabitants (Jackson, 1990: 26).

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the international community reacted to humanitarian crises in Iraq, Bosnia, Haiti, Rwanda, and Kosovo, where ethnic, religious, and political clashes led to massive human rights violations, even massacres, and genocides. The UNSC, with the consent of non-Western great powers like China and Russia, defined various humanitarian situations as “a threat to international peace and security,” and

authorized the use of force in some instances, like Somalia in 1992 (United Nations Security Council, 1992). In these cases of humanitarian interventions, three conditions appeared: an existing or potential humanitarian catastrophe, a definition of this humanitarian crisis as a threat to international peace and security by the UNSC, and an explicit authorization to use force by the UNSC. A humanitarian intervention sanctioned by the UNSC was considered legitimate and legal; however, the problem was that it required the consensus of the council, especially that of its permanent members. Thus, humanitarian intervention requiring the consent of great powers is obviously open to political negotiations; as such, its moral ground would be debatable because the consent among great powers does not necessarily rule out the possibility of the abuse of humanitarian intervention.

Contention about humanitarian intervention reached a new high with the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia as a response to the attempts at ethnic cleansing of the Albanian population in Kosovo. Since the military intervention took place without a UN Security Council mandate, its legality and legitimacy, regardless of the moral arguments put forward by NATO, attracted a heated debate. The ex-post justification of a report published by a group of prominent legal scholars was that, while as a result of the lack of UNSC approval the intervention was clearly “illegal,” due to the ethical aspect of the intervention, namely saving a vulnerable population from crimes against humanity, it was also legitimate (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000). Such justifications could not end the contentious nature of humanitarian intervention both as a norm and a practice.

Responsibility to protect: An attempt at consent building

The pressing problem of the legality of humanitarian interventions, even in situations where a population is at serious risk of being victims of atrocity crimes, prompted a search for a consented

mechanism to use. In this context, Kofi Annan, the then UN Secretary General, addressed the General Assembly in 2000, asking:

If humanitarian interventions are, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica—to gross and systematic violations of human rights that offend every aspect of our common humanity? (United Nations, 2000: 48).

Following the Secretary-General's speech, an international commission was established, comprising high-profile international experts. The commission issued its report in 2001, proposing the concept of responsibility to protect (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001). It was an attempt to build an international consensus on how to respond to massive violations of human rights that shock the human conscience. The doctrine of R2P, thus, cannot be separated from the concept of humanitarian intervention. In fact, R2P has been described not only as a reincarnation of humanitarian intervention but also as the most comprehensive interpretation of it (Pattison, 2010).

R2P represents a shift from sovereignty as authority to sovereignty as responsibility, with the belief that the sovereignty of the state binds the sovereign itself and is no superior to the rights of its citizens (Evans, 2015; Hehir, 2024). Thus, according to the doctrine of R2P, it is the state that is primarily responsible for protecting its populations from mass atrocities. If the state is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens, the responsibility passes on to the international community. The effort of the international community to protect populations, even if by using force, cannot be interpreted as a breach of the sovereign rights of the target state, since sovereignty becomes void when the state fails to protect its citizens. This led the British historian Martin Gilbert to describe R2P as “the most significant adjustment to national sovereignty in 360 years” (Gilbert, 2007: 4).

R2P, in fact, offered three new ideas. First of all, the character of intervention changed from “right to intervene” to “responsibility to protect.” Secondly, the agency has been pluralized, specifically emphasizing the duty of all states to prevent mass atrocities. Lastly, the range of likely responses has been broadened, making military intervention only one among many. They include three sets of actions: responsibility to prevent, responsibility to react, which involves, on occasions, the use of force, and responsibility to rebuild. When it comes to the coercive mechanism of R2P, which can still be viewed as a form of humanitarian intervention, it must proceed with a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution. However, in order to be regarded as ‘legitimate,’ the coercive component first requires determining that the threat must involve mass atrocity crimes like *genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity*. Second, the purpose of the intervention must be to stop mass atrocity crimes. Third, military intervention must be adopted as a last resort and be proportionate to the threat. And finally, it must also be ensured that the intervention leads to less harm than inaction.

By 2004, R2P was already being referred to as an “emerging norm” (United Nations, 2004). At the 2005 United Nations World Summit, R2P was adopted unanimously by the heads of state and government. The World Summit Outcome Document narrowed down the responsibility of national governments, specifically speaking of the protection of populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. The international community was tasked with assisting sovereign states in fulfilling their responsibilities. Moreover, the Outcome Document underlined that the international community will take proper action in a case where a sovereign state “manifestly fails” to fulfil its responsibility to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. After all peaceful means in accordance with the UN Charter, Chapters VI and VIII, are exhausted, the international community, through the Security Council, will take

collective action in line with Chapter VII under the mandate of maintaining international peace and security. Doyle describes the approval of Outcome Document 2005 as a turning point for the emerging doctrine, stating that: “R2P could not claim clear legality, but it could claim legitimacy after the 2005 World Summit Outcome” (Doyle, 2011: 77). Furthermore, in 2005, the UN Security Council, reflecting an emerging consensus on R2P, reaffirmed the World Summit Document in its Resolution 1674 (United Nations Security Council, 2006). Until the coercive element of R2P was implemented during the 2011 Libyan intervention, a broad international agreement on R2P appeared to exist, despite the uneasiness of Russia, China, and certain countries of the global South (United Nations Security Council, 2011).

Overall, humanitarian intervention and R2P as concepts and policy practices have emerged as attempts to address the question of how to respond to mass atrocities. However, they differ significantly in their legal foundations, legitimacy, and operational mechanisms. While both claim to be concerned with ending gross human rights violations, R2P stands as an attempt to legalize and constrain what had previously been an ad hoc and often controversial practice (Crossley, 2018). Humanitarian intervention has often lacked a clear legal basis, as was the case with the Indian intervention in Bangladesh in 1977 and the Cambodian intervention in Vietnam in 1979. Such cases often caused great controversies raising the issues of selectivity, misuse, and the pursuit of geopolitical interests while using humanitarian concerns as pretexts (Hehir, 2024). The resulting ambiguity surrounding its legitimacy, if not its moral ground, has made humanitarian intervention a contentious concept in international relations.

R2P, having attained the endorsement of the UN General Assembly and Security Council, on the other hand, presents a more structured and legally grounded approach. It narrows the conditions for intervention to specific crimes such as genocide, war crimes, ethnic

cleansing, and crimes against humanity. This narrowed scope of R2P aims to eliminate the ambiguities of gross human rights violations as the ground for intervention, which shock the human conscience, and anchor intervention in a more precise legal and moral framework (Hehir, 2024). Moreover, the use of force under the doctrine of R2P requires UN Security Council authorization, making multilateral consensus a central pillar of its legitimacy. Thus, implementation of R2P is not left to the unilateral decisions of states but envisions a multilateral effort to build consensus in order to enhance the legitimacy of intervention and reduce international controversy. This goes against the often unilateral notion of humanitarian intervention, which aims to strengthen its legal foundation and reflect the consent of the international community. However, as explained, in cases of political divisions within the Security Council, R2P can become ineffective, and in some instances, it may become a tool of great power bargaining among the veto powers in the Security Council.

The ethics of responsibility to protect

It is morally inconceivable to defend mass atrocities committed by a state or a non-state actor. But, how is one to respond to them? Should states do something concrete and even coercive to prevent and stop such atrocities that take place in foreign countries? Or, should they only condemn such acts taking place in foreign countries and remain inactive?

R2P arises from these morally pressing questions. The key normative principle of R2P, in accordance with the UN Charter and the Genocide Convention of 1948, is to prevent mass atrocity crimes from taking place, and stop them if already being committed (Doyle, 2011). As such, R2P provides answers to the question of “how states should act when confronted by atrocities such as genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing?” Mirroring humanitarian intervention, R2P is essentially built upon the tenets of the 5th-century just war theory of St. Augustine, which established

the basis of the just war theory as regards just cause, right intention, legitimate authority, proportionality, and a reasonable prospect for success (Walzer, 2006). Each of these components has ethical aspects in its essence. During the 19th century, influenced by Hugo Grotius' work on the newly emerging international law, European powers introduced the concept of humanitarian intervention as a just cause for using force against a sovereign state that was persecuting its subjects (Rodogno, 2012). Similarly, John Stuart Mill, contemplating the dilemma of human security versus state sovereignty, argued that while intervention in another “civilized state” is not legitimate, intervention in “barbarous nations” with an illiberal government that inflicts violence on its population is justifiable (Pattison, 2010).

Just cause

R2P permits the use of force as part of the responsibility to react in “extreme and exceptional cases.” But what is an extreme and exceptional case? The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) defines this as “cases of violence which so genuinely ‘shock the conscience of mankind’” (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001: 32). “Large-scale loss of life” and “large-scale ethnic cleansing” were referred to as warranting intervention for human protection purposes. Lesser violations did not count as constituting just cause for military action. In fact, the ICISS made it clear that “military intervention for human protection purposes should be restricted exclusively... to those situations where large-scale loss of civilian life or ethnic cleansing is threatened or taking place” (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001: 32). This does not quantify the number, but refers to the severity of the situation. Based on this view, the Outcome Document of 2005 specified such cases of mass atrocities like genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing as just causes to wage war (United Nations, 2004).

Anyone with a sound conscience would not defend or excuse such crimes since they are outrageous and morally indefensible. Yet definitional problems about “large scale” or specific atrocities like ethnic cleansing are likely to generate legal and moral debates when a particular case is being assessed. This is particularly the case regarding the claims of the just cause *threshold*. What acts will be considered a crime against humanity, triggering forceful intervention? Walzer argues that the threshold of mass atrocities should be kept at the highest possible level and only acts that “shock the moral conscience of mankind” warrant international military intervention (Walzer, 2006: 107). But what are they? How many murders need to be committed in order to shock human conscience? Moreover, there are questions about the authority that decides that the threshold of mass atrocities has been breached. Who are they? What is the basis of their entitlement to determine when an atrocity triggers humanitarian intervention?

According to the Outcome Document, the UNSC can decide whether the just cause threshold has been breached (United Nations, 2004). Does the Security Council represent the international conscience? Given the status of five permanent members with veto powers and the practice of political bargaining among great powers, the Security Council can hardly claim to be the supreme moral authority to pass a determinative judgment on such issues. Should the ethics of stopping mass atrocities depend on the consent of five states, each in pursuit of their own self-perceived national interest? Being powerful does not make one virtuous or moral. Besides, the four atrocity crimes that trigger intervention as a just cause may fall short of some massive human rights violations. One can argue that these four atrocities explicitly referred to have significantly narrowed down the moral ground of R2P, leaving tyrannical regimes with a free hand to do all lesser atrocities at home. In some cases, violations may not fall within the category of the four, yet they shock the human conscience, or at least the conscience of some people.

Right intention

The primary purpose of the intervening state/s must be to “halt or avert human suffering” (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001: 35). R2P, thus, puts special emphasis on right intention, which is the will to stop human suffering, terminate armed conflict, and protect the safety of vulnerable populations. How can it be determined that the primary purpose of the intervening state is the protection of people from mass atrocities? In order to ensure the right intention of the intervener, R2P prefers multilateral operations and cooperation of regional countries. The support of the victims on the ground is considered another way of keeping the right intention of the intervening state/s checked.

However, even in such cases, is it realistic to expect states to forget their interests, gains, and losses when they claim to act for humanitarian purposes? States are responsible for providing for the welfare and security of their citizens. The ICISS report, in fact, realizes the possibility of the intervening state having mixed interests seeking economic and strategic gains (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001). This makes a complex case for the defense of R2P operations on the altruistic ethics of saving strangers. If an intervention for human protection purposes, as claimed, is not motivated by humanitarian concerns but by power politics or economic considerations, the moral base will be shaky. Moreover, if morality is upheld so long as it serves the ‘national interest’ of a state, then it lacks a categorical/universal value.

The R2P idealists presume that states will act decisively in situations where they don’t have anything to gain strategically, but only to “save foreigners” (Wheeler, 2000). Instead of expecting sovereign states to act without taking into account their national interests, the R2P realists suggest that states can reformulate their national interests with a broader perspective to conform to the norms of R2P. That is to say that it is in the interest of states not to engage in mass atrocity crimes, and act decisively to prevent and avert them in

foreign countries for the sake of maintaining their sovereignty and securing peace and security, even if this means not complying with universal moral principles. Thus, in this way, R2P offers a convergence of morality and interest for states by redefining sovereignty, peace, and security in moral terms (Ralph, 2018).

Legitimate Authority

R2P stresses that interventions for human protection purposes must be conducted through a legitimate authority. The R2P's sole authority is the UN Security Council. R2P, warning the UN member states not to use force unilaterally, envisions that intervention on humanitarian grounds invoking R2P must acquire UNSC approval. In fact, the Outcome Document of the UN renders the use of coercive means under R2P conditional on UNSC approval, a move aimed at securing the support of non-Western veto powers in the Council, namely China and Russia (United Nations, 2004).

On what moral grounds can the UNSC be the ultimate legitimizer of R2P interventions? From a political and moral perspective, granting the UNSC ultimate power to decide on such humanitarian issues is problematic. Some would reject the UNSC as claiming to reflect an international consensus, given the presence of the permanent five (P5) with veto power (Ziegler, 2016). Moreover, the ICISS report pleads with the permanent five not to use their veto power to obstruct Security Council resolution authorizing use of force for human protection purposes when "their vital state interests are not involved" (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001: 37). What about when their vital state interests are involved? This clearly admits that the Security Council, in fact, the entire R2P mechanism, is held hostage to the national interests of the P5 states, which weakens the moral standing of UNSC-sanctioned R2P actions or non-action in some cases.

It is recognized that unilateral intervention is a divisive issue, and thus, an intervention for human protection purposes must obtain the

approval of the Security Council. But if there is no consensus in the SC? And if there are willing states to intervene unilaterally to stop mass atrocities? It can be inferred that the use of force should be permissible, morally if not legally, within the logic of R2P, which entails a responsibility to all and each state. Indeed, R2P makes it clear that in cases where a sovereign state cannot fulfil its responsibility to protect its people, the responsibility shifts to the international community as a whole, not to Western or powerful states. The debate on who is to intervene is inevitably linked to the power and motivations of the interveners, on which the legitimacy of intervention can be established (Pattison, 2010).

Proportionality and Last Resort

When intervening, R2P underlines the importance of observing the principle of proportionality. The military response to a state that manifestly endangers the safety of a population should be proportional, enough to protect the people, and not more than that. “The scale, duration, and intensity” of intervention should be minimal to achieve the humanitarian objective. The means must also be in accordance with the sought objective of protecting civilians (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001).

R2P with coercive elements should be employed only as a last resort. Responsibility to react cannot be justified if the responsibility to prevent has not been applied. Every diplomatic and non-military option must have been exhausted before a coercive action is taken. Otherwise, there is no doubt that measures other than military did not have a proper ground. Only after good faith attempts and negotiations fail to address the crisis and non-military coercive mechanisms are proved ineffective can the use of force for human protection purposes be legitimately used. How can one measure that intervention is the last resort and that all other means have failed? Substantiating this is not an easy task and always invites political and moral counterarguments (Weiss, 2007).

More Good Than Harm

Intervention should be undertaken only if it stands a “reasonable chance of success” to stop or avert atrocities or human suffering (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001: 37). Military intervention should not inflict more harm on the people than good. In other words, the outcome of the intervention should not be worse than that of non-intervention. Otherwise, there could be no moral justification for the use of force for human protection purposes (Daalder & Stavridis, 2012). The very *raison d’être* of intervention is to secure the protection of civilians.

If the humanitarian action triggers a more significant conflict, it cannot be justified. An unacceptably high human cost on the part of the interveners, or a risk to peace and security, does not justify R2P. The point is that R2P should not broaden the conflict and expand human suffering. On this ground, the ICISS report openly states that military action against P5 and other major powers would be precluded, even if all the other conditions for intervention were met (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001). This is to admit that R2P, with its coercive component, could only be employed by the powerful against the weak. What is worse is that this is acknowledged as such by the initiators of R2P, who accept it as a reality of international life without questioning its ethical basis.

Conclusion

Humanitarian intervention is primarily grounded in moral considerations in response to atrocities committed against vulnerable populations. Its legal/normative basis, however, remains controversial. R2P, on the other hand, has claimed to establish a consensual and normative basis on how to respond to mass atrocities by securing the endorsement of the UN General Assembly and Security Council. Instead of unilateral decisions by sovereign states, R2P requires Security Council authorization for any coercive

measures in an attempt to emphasize multilateralism and legitimacy. Yet, none of these have freed R2P from the moral and political shortcomings of the concept and practice of humanitarian intervention, though it has emerged as a normative response to the moral and political failures of humanitarian intervention in the post–Cold War era. Being heavily embedded in the ethical consideration of protecting populations from mass atrocities, R2P was welcomed with unprecedented hope and hailed as an “emerging norm” that anchored humanitarian intervention within a framework of legal legitimacy, ethical justification, and multilateral consensus. It attempted to bridge international law with international humanitarian principles based on a general consensus that the international community cannot remain indifferent to crimes that shock human conscience. However, this normative and political consensus was rather short-lived. The way in which R2P was implemented in Libya by Western powers, going beyond the mandate of the UNSC, generated significant contention (Falk, 2011; Pattison, 2011; Dagi, 2021). As Falk rightly observed, “NATO may have destroyed the prospects for future uses of the principle of responsibility to protect” (Falk, 2011: 5), a prediction that proved correct in the case of the Syrian civil war. It has exposed the fragile boundaries between principle and power, as well as between ethics and realpolitik, undermining the likelihood of a moral and political consensus on the use of R2P in future cases. All these raise the issue that R2P is not immune to the shortcomings of humanitarian intervention as it has been implemented in the past. Ethical principles underpinning R2P, such as just cause, right intention, legitimate authority, proportionality, last resort, and the prospect for success, are conceptually robust; however, their application remains politically selective and morally inconsistent (Ziegler, 2016). Thus, when it comes to the use of force, the ethics of R2P are not stronger than those of older forms of humanitarian intervention. Non-coercive elements of R2P, such as the responsibility to prevent and rebuild, are less complicated morally and carry fewer risks of

hazardous outcomes. But, then, the question remains: how to respond to mass atrocities that shock human conscience?

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