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October Roundtable: UN Secretary-General Report on “Responsibility to Protect: Timely and Decisive Response”, Introduction

Abstract

An annotation of:

“Responsibility to Protect: Timely and Decisive Response” Ban Ki-moon, July 2012.

Keywords

Human rights, United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, Responsibility to protect, International intervention, Intervention measures

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UN Secretary-General Report on “Responsibility to Protect: Timely and Decisive Response”

Article under review: [“Responsibility to Protect: Timely and Decisive Response” Ban Ki-moon, July 2012.](#)

This month's Roundtable focuses on the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Ban Ki-moon's 2012 report, "The Responsibility to Protect: Timely and Decisive Response." In the report, the UNSG discusses tools under the third pillar of Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) that are available for implementation – that is to say, the responsibility of the international community to respond and take collective action "in a timely and decisive manner" if a state manifestly fails to protect its population or perpetrates atrocities itself.

This is the fourth UNSG report on the subject of RtoP; a previous report in 2009 outlined the doctrine's three central and interrelated pillars. The first pillar indicates that the State carries the primary responsibility for protecting populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing, as well as for suppressing incitement of these crimes. The second pillar highlights the international community's obligation to encourage and assist States in fulfilling this responsibility. Finally, the third pillar states that the international community has a responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian, and other means to protect populations from these crimes if the state in question is manifestly failing to uphold its own responsibility. In this case, the international community must be prepared to take collective action to protect populations, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

The UNSG's report's focus on implementation is perhaps partly attributable to recent criticism of the NATO-led implementation of the Security Council's mandate "to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack" in Libya. The report also coincides with the Security Council's paralysis over Syria, which has continued despite clear evidence from mid-2011 onward that the massive human rights violations in Syria were worse (and deteriorating faster) than had been the case in Libya.

The report discusses a wide range of implementation measures, such as mediation, preventive diplomacy, public advocacy, fact-finding missions, commission of inquiry, monitoring and observer missions, International Criminal Court referrals, targeted sanctions, and the use of military force. It also discusses the necessity to protect and act responsibly during the implementation of RtoP, building on the notion of "responsibility while protecting," proposed by Brazil in a 2011 concept note.

In one of the liveliest panels yet to be featured in HRHW's Roundtable, a group of RtoP experts critically discusses some possible responses to atrocity crimes proposed by the UNSG report and examines the report's implications for the future of this international norm.

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