

BOOK REVIEW Elias Omondi Opongo

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BOOK REVIEW

Responsibility to Protect: The Global Effort to End Mass Atrocities

By Alex J. Bellamy

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The focus of this book falls under the tradition of humanitarian intervention (Vincent, 1996; Hehir 1998; Opongo, 2008) to protect humanity from conditions that threaten life. The running concept is the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) which was adopted by the 2005 UN World Summit. At this Summit world leaders committed themselves to the responsibility of defending and protecting citizens from all forms of insecurities such as gross violation of human rights whether war crimes, genocide, ethnic or racial cleansing. As such states have the responsibility of defending and protecting citizens threaten by their own government. Bellamy (2009:2) asserts that in “April 2006, the UN Security Council unanimously reaffirmed the R2P and indicated its readiness to adopt appropriate measures where necessary.” Hence, this concept strongly affirms ‘Sovereignty as Responsibility. ‘The R2P has three main components: “the responsibilities to prevent, to react and to rebuild” (Bellamy, 2009:3). The body responsible for the implementation and monitoring of R2P objectives is the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS).

Bellamy asserts that his book has twofold objectives: first, discuss the origins, sources, meanings and challenges of R2P; second, operationalise R2P and implications for prevention, reaction and rebuilding, with an assessment of how these goals can be achieved. The challenge of carrying out interventions to protect threatened human lives is an arduous challenge that calls for persistent negotiations, putting up a coalition of the willing and accurately calculating the benefits and challenges of such an action. The ICISS does not stipulate the criteria for the use of force, and instead puts more emphasis on international efforts to preventing and mitigating conditions that lead to genocide and gross violation of human rights. R2P is therefore adopted as a guiding principle for action, and not necessarily as a norm that legally binds all nations.

This book is divided into six chapters: Sovereignty and Human Rights; The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty; The 2005 World Summit; Prevention; and Reaction and Rebuilding. The challenge of striking a balance between state’s sovereignty under the Westphalian principle of non-interference and the state’s responsibility to its citizen is fundamental in ensuring the success of R2P. Bellamy (2009:19) underscores that sovereignty as responsibility rests on the fact that every individual person has inalienable rights that cannot be rescinded since these “rights are universal and not culture specific.” But at the same time governments have a responsibility to safeguard these rights, and where they fail to do so, the international community has the mandate to protect the rights of the citizens.

While the 2005 World Summit did not fully agree on the criteria for intervention, the guiding principle for intervention was based on intervening on extreme cases of human rights violation. Building on the Just War theory, Bellamy outlines the principles that offer conditionality for military intervention: there has to be a *just cause* (large scale human rights violation); *right intention* (halt the violations and save lives); *last resort* (military option should only be taken after all other peaceful means have been exhausted); *proportional means* (minimum use of force); *reasonable prospects* (assessment of realistic hope of the success of military intervention); *right authority* (the military intervention has to be approved by a right authority, in this case UN Security Council).

The success of the adoption of R2P by the 2005 World Summit is largely attributed to Kofi Anan's commitment to pushing the nations to take seriously the responsibility of defending human rights. The R2P's architecture, the Canadian Gareth Evans, was given full support by Anan, as a result, R2P emerged from being an idea supported by just a few nations, to full adoption by the entire Summit.

Responsibility to protect equally implies responsibility to prevent. The R2P remains vague as to what extent one can prevent violent conflict. In peace studies prevention would imply immediate, short and long terms objectives of addressing the root causes of protracted conflicts, poor governance, poverty, marginalization and social participation. Some of the root causes could be dealt with internally within a country whereas others are more sophisticated and would require an international consensus. For example, international economic policies that marginalize poor countries contribute largely to instabilities in these nations. The ICISS stipulates four areas of prevention: political/diplomatic, economic, legal and military. However, there are still gaps on exactly how these are supposed to be implemented. Bellamy on the other hand identifies four areas of prevention: early warning, preventive diplomacy, ending impunity and preventive deployment.

Reacting to violations of human rights poses the challenge of using non-coercive force, such as sanctions, embargoes and economic pressures that push governments to stop violations and in some cases allow a UN peacekeeping force. Bellamy (2009:147) observes that by "early 2008, the UN had seventeen operations and around 80,000 personnel deployed around the world." Lastly Bellamy puts an emphasis on rebuilding or post conflict reconstruction. Countries coming out of war and extreme violations of human rights need international support in rebuilding destroyed infrastructure, re-creation of collapsed institutions of governance, and economic resilience. However,

these require long term commitment from international community, which is not always the case.

While the author undertakes an exhaustive discussion on R2P, he however fails to make a strong link between R2P on the one hand, and the pre-existent sovereignty and non-interference tradition in international relations, on the other hand. The concept of R2P is definitely not new in international relations. In fact, International Law recognizes sovereignty of states, the right to self-determination and non-interference. Already in 19th Century John Stuart advanced the non-interference argument based on morality of states. Opongo (2009:113) asserts that “the principle of non-intervention is a question of logic, meaning that, if international law safeguards the sovereignty and independence of states, then it subsequently follows that intervention is an illegitimate infraction of state sovereignty.” Opongo (2008: 113-114) further observes that the concept of non-intervention emerged in the 5th century, and later in 14-16th century, hence from St. Augustine’s responsibility to self-defense to Thomas Aquinas’ articulation of principles of just war theory that were later adopted into international relations in regard to military intervention. However, with the rise of sovereignty and the Peace of Westphalia in 17th – 19th Century, the principle of non-intervention was adopted” (Opongo, 2008: 114). In the 20th and 21st century the move has been towards protection of civilian rights, and subsequent adoption of sovereignty as responsibility to citizens and international community. It implies thus setting a dialogue process between realist who defend the principle of non-interference and liberalists who put emphasis on individual and group basic human rights (Hehir, 1998: 30).

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