History and Timeline of R2P

2001

The doctrine of the responsibility to protect was first elaborated in 2001 by a group of prominent international human rights leaders comprising the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. Under their mandate, the Commission sought to undertake the two-fold challenge of reconciling the international community's responsibility to address massive violations of humanitarian norms and ensuring respect for the sovereign rights of nation states.

Led by Gareth Evans, former Foreign Minister of Australia, and Mohamed Sahnoun, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General, the Commission issued its report in December 2001. Focusing on the "right of humanitarian intervention", this report examined when, if ever, it is appropriate for states for take coercive - and in particular military - action, against another state for the purpose of protecting populations at risk. In essence, the group concluded that when a group (or groups) of people is suffering from egregious acts of violence resulting from internal war, insurgency, repression or state failure, and the state where these crimes are taking place is unable or unwilling to act to prevent or protect its peoples, the international community has a moral duty to intervene to avert or halt these atrocities from occurring.

2004

The "responsibility to protect" doctrine received renewed emphasis in 2004 when the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan created the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change. The Panel was established to identify major threats facing the international community in the broad field of peace and security and to generate new ideas about policies and institutions aimed at preventing or confronting these challenges.

After a year of deliberations, the panel issued its findings in a report entitled A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility, in December 2004. The report provided a new assessment of the numerous challenges ahead for peaceful interstate relations and made recommendations of the necessary if these challenges are to be met effectively through collective action.

With respect to R2P, the Panel endorsed this "emerging norm", stating that:

"...There is a growing recognition that the issue is not the â€œright to interveneâ€• of any State, but the â€œresponsibility to protectâ€• of every State when it comes to people suffering from avoidable catastrophe â€” mass murder and rape, ethnic cleansing by forcible expulsion and terror, and deliberate starvation and exposure to disease. And there is a growing acceptance that while sovereign Governments have the primary responsibility to protect their own citizens from such catastrophes, when they are unable or unwilling to do so that responsibility should be taken up by the wider international community â€” with it spanning a continuum involving prevention, response to violence, if necessary, and rebuilding shattered societies.

We endorse the emerging norm that there is a collective international responsibility to protect, exercisable by the Security Council authorizing military intervention as a last resort, in the event of genocide and other large scale killing, ethnic cleansing or serious violations of international humanitarian law which sovereign Governments have proved powerless or unwilling to prevent." (Report: A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility, paras 201 and 203)

2005

In September 2005, R2P was once again enlivened, this time with the full support of the international community. At the 60th session of the U.N. General Assembly gathering, 191 heads of state and government representatives unanimously endorsed a resolution supporting the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. This resolution laid the foundations for a new global moral compact between every State and every population on earth. As adopted, atrocity crimes â€“ genocide, crimes against humanity (including ethnic cleansing) and war crimes - were considered a universal concern and therefore were responsibility of the international community.

During the 2005 General Assembly World Summit, world leaders stated:

â€œEach and individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it. The international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility and support the United Nations in establishing an early warning capability.

The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In this context, we are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. We stress the need for the General Assembly to continue consideration of the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and its implications, bearing in mind the principles of the Charter and international law. We also intend to commit ourselves, as necessary and appropriate, to helping States build capacity to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and to assisting those which are under stress before crises and conflicts break outâ€• (A/RES/60/1, para. 138 and 139).

2006

Following on the momentum of the World Summit endorsement, the U.N. Security Council included in Resolution 1674 (28 April 2006) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict a re-affirmation of R2P. Then in Resolution 1706 (31 August 2006), which sought to provide a peacekeeping mission to Darfur, the Council once again recognized the importance of R2P and re-asserted its commitment to the principles of this doctrine.