Volume 18 Issue 27
Originally issued as F3

Global Journal of human-social science: F
Political Science
Volume 18 Issue 3 Version 1.0 Year 2018
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

The Responsibility to Protect Principle in Shaping Inter-national Military Intervention: The Case of Syria

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Keywords: *responsibility to protect, military intervention, sovereignty, member-states.*

GJHSS-F Classification: *FOR Code: 160699*



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The Responsibility to Protect Principle in Shaping International Military Intervention: The Case of Syria

Mlambo Mavelous [α] & Kurebwa Jeffrey [σ]

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I. Introduction

After the Cold war, international politics has been characterised by increased focus on human rights (Brown, 2008). In some countries such as Iraq, Syria, Libya, South Sudan and Palestine, human rights are being violated while United Nations (UN) member-states continuously engage in protracted debates on whether to intervene in order to prevent further bloodshed. The use of force to prevent gross human rights violations in other states is highly controversial because it violates fundamental norms and principles in international relations protecting states from interference by other states, such as the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention. However, in September 2005 at the UN World Summit in New York, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) unanimously adopted the R2P principle. According to Evans (2012), R2P is a set of principles that provide the international community with a framework for taking action to prevent or stop mass atrocities.

Gartner (2011) points out that the R2P principle was in response to a number of recent historical cases which included the Rwandan genocide of 1994 which killed thousands of people, the massacre of 8,000 Bosnian civilians in Srebrenica in 1995, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) air bombardment of Kosovo in 1999. On 17 March 2011 the UNSC adopted Resolution 1973 which demanded an immediate ceasefire of all hostilities in the civil conflict in Libya and authorised the international community to impose a no-fly zone to enforce this ceasefire. On 19 March 2011 implementation of Resolution 1973 commenced as French fighter jets bombed military vehicles belonging to the former Libyan leader Colonel Mummar Gadaffi's regime that were advancing on the rebel stronghold of Benghazi. According to Bellamy (2012) NATO assumed command of all operations relating to enforcement of the no-fly zone on 31 March 2011 which ultimately and actively helped foster regime change in Libya. On 31 October 2011 the UN effectively ended NATO's mandate for military action on the basis of Resolution 1973. The military intervention in Libya was the first time that the UNSC explicitly authorised the use of military force.

The 2011 Syrian uprising is part of the wider Arab revolts against governments and its leaders. These demonstrations across Syria developed into a nationwide revolt organised by opposition left thousands of civilians dead (Beauchamp, 2012). According to UN (2012) over 220 000 innocent civilians were killed since the war broke out in 2011. Adams (2015) asserts that government forces were accused of dropping crude improvised barrel bombs packed with chemical weapons targeting extremist groups linked to the Islamic State of Iraq. The above examples show the need for intervention through the R2P principle as a useful norm in shaping military humanitarian intervention in any state. Notwithstanding the successful implementation of the R2P principle in Libya which culminated in the ouster of Colonel Gaddafi's regime from power in Libya, the situation in Syria is however different. Adams (2015) allude that there is a lack of political will from the

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international community to use the R2P through the United Nations to intervene and stopping the civil war in Syria. The turmoil and massive human rights violations have led to numerous calls for the international community to take decisive action by implementing the R2P principle in Syria just like in Libya.

II. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of using the R2P principle in shaping military intervention in Syria.

III. Research design and Methodology

A case study research design was chosen for the study. A case study allowed for the assessment of the use of the R2P norm as a tool for military intervention in the Syrian conflict. According to Silverman (2008) the case study design allows examination of how particular actions and perceptions are embedded in particular patterns of social organisations. Purposive sampling was chosen for the study. Three key informants drawn from the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The three participants were chosen on the basis of their United Nations peace keeping experiences in various missions in Africa and Asia.

The respondent from the ZNA gave views on the use the merits and demerits of military intervention under the R2P principle in Syria while the ZRP discussed on the effects of the prolonged use of the R2P on the internal security of Syria. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs official highlighted on the impact of the UNSC on the use of the R2P principle in Syria. Documentary search relied on documents such as the United Nations General Assembly's Resolutions on Syria, United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Syria, and UN Secretary-General's Annual Reports on Syria. Peer reviewed journal articles, textbooks and newspaper articles relating to the Syrian crisis were also reviewed.

IV. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section provided a review of available literature on the R2P principle with particular interest on how it could be used to shape humanitarian intervention in Syria. The study relied on the theory of liberal institutionalism. The theory emphasises the role that international organisations and international society play in world affairs. Liberal institutionalism argues that in order for there to be peace in international affairs, states must cooperate with each other and in effect yield some of their sovereignty to create integrated communities aimed at promoting economic growth and respond to regional and international security issues (Keohane, 2012). According to Bull (2010) international society exists when a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values, for a society which binds them through common set of rules in their relations within one another and share in working together. Keohane (2012) identified four characteristics of liberal institutionalism namely; multiple channels which allow for interaction among actors across national borders, increasing interaction and links between actors and non-state actors, states seeking to maximise absolute gains through cooperation, and also addressing the greatest obstacle to cooperation in world affairs due to non-compliance or cheating by states.

The Theory of Liberal Institutionalism also postulates that non-state actors and those that are marginalised by the modernist project can be brought back into world affairs as it focuses on international organisations and international regimes that are based on rules, norms and principles governing interaction of state and non-state actors (Jackson and Sorensen, 2012). Keohane (2012) assert that the international regimes such as principles, norms, rules and procedures contain injunctions on behaviour and obligations. The rise in globalisation and concerns over terrorism, drug trafficking and pandemics such as HIV and AIDS has shown that states can no longer react unilaterally to these threats but rather through regional and global regimes where policy responses can be coordinated in dealing with such new security threats (Jackson and Sorensen, 2012). For instance, the development of the African Union is a good example of how states have formed regional communities aimed at dealing with policy issues. It can be argued that the African Union has created a set of rules permitting states to collectively achieve outcomes which cannot be obtained acting individually (Evans, 2008).

Liberal institutionalism has enabled states to deal with security issues such as nuclear non-proliferation, civil wars and the threat of terrorism through international organisations such as the United Nations (Hoffman, 2010). Liberal institutionalism believes in the common interests of human beings and that they are capable of cooperating in domestic affairs as well as in international affairs for the benefit of all. Examples of the African Union and the United Nations demonstrate that international cooperation is possible. International institutions promote cooperation between states which reduces the lack of trust between states. Resultantly, the development of norms and principles such as the R2P principle demonstrate the role international organisations play in international relations. The Theory of Liberal Institutionalism is therefore relevant to evaluating the use of military intervention in Syria as the obtaining situation requires international cooperation.

a) The Concept of Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

The concept of R2P evolved out of dismay at the international community's failure to prevent mass

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atrocities in Rwanda and other countries in the 1990s. It represents a re-conceptualisation of the relationship between state sovereignty and human rights in which sovereignty is viewed 'not as an absolute term of authority but as a kind of responsibility' (Thakur, 2013: 251). In general terms, R2P seeks to prevent and respond to genocide and other mass atrocity crimes by recognising duties held by individual states and the international community (Lie, 2008).

The term R2P was coined by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) which was established in the aftermath of NATO's military action during the Kosovo crisis of 1999 and whose report was published in 2001 (Evans and Sahnoun, 2001). It is often described as an emerging international norm which sets forth that states have the primary responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing and when a state fails to protect its populations, the responsibility falls on the international community (International Coalition for the Responsibility to protect, 2001:2). The R2P is only intended to protect people against certain specified mass crimes when the State in which they are taking place is 'manifestly failing' to do so (Evans, 2011). This view is similar to the original United Nations General Assembly World Summit Outcome Document (2005) which articulated that the R2P approach assigns states the primary responsibility to protect its citizens from war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing. Only if this responsibility has not been acted upon domestically, responsibility is transferred to the international community which is allowed to use force as an instrument of last resort and when other peaceful means have failed.

The R2P encompasses instruments of early warning, conflict prevention, mediation, good governance, military enforcement and may even extent into peace building and reconciliation after the end of a conflict. Despite the emphasis that R2P has much broader aspects, there is nevertheless a persistent and widespread perception that R2P is essentially synonymous with military action in response to mass atrocities (Evans, 2011). Indeed, the elastic nature of the R2P definition has sometimes created confusion. This unfortunately contributes to resistance of the R2P by some quarters and has also led to a tendency to overlook the importance of non-military efforts to mitigate mass atrocities. According to Thakur (2013), military activities or their threat can indeed be useful to prevent or halt mass atrocities with the caveat that R2P is more than military action. Although there is growing international acceptance of R2P, a minority of states remain suspicious of the concept, particularly because its association with non-consensual military action for humanitarian purposes presents challenges to traditional notions of state sovereignty and non-intervention in domestic affairs (Garwood-Gowers, 2012). Those concerns are worsened by a perception that R2P is being applied selectively and inconsistently as a tool of powerful Western states (Boreham, 2011).

It should be noted that most academic attention and political debate on R2P has centred on the military intervention aspect of the concept rather than the preventive dimension which offers the greatest potential to enhance civilian protection. The former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stressed that the best form of protection is prevention. According to Ban Ki-moon, prevention saves lives as well as resources (UNSG, 2011). Breau (2007) acknowledges that while others disagree with this view, in practice, preventive action has remained an under-utilised part of the R2P norm. He further posits that decisive international action to protect civilians has usually been taken only after full-scale conflict or mass violence has erupted. The R2P therefore offers a more effective international engagement platform aimed at assisting states under stress or at risk of imminent crisis. This potential stems from R2P's dual functions as a 'speech act' to catalyse political will for earlier action, and as a specific 'policy agenda' for preventing mass atrocities (Bellamy, 2009:160). Furthermore, R2P's major contribution to advancing the protection of civilians agenda lies in its scope and ability to mobilise political support for operational preventive action in circumstances where a state is willing but unable to fulfil its obligations under the principle. Where there are initial signs of violence that threatens civilians, R2P may act as the catalyst for the international community to offer timely assistance to a state to stabilise a volatile situation before it escalates to the point of mass atrocities. In such circumstances, international involvement occurs with the consent of the state. The international community's engagement in Kenya's post-election unrest in 2008 is a good example.

b) Coercive Measures of the Responsibility to Protect

The R2P envisages the possibility of preventive deployment of military forces to assist a state that is under stress. The UN Secretary-General's 2009 Report expressly states that "pillar two could also encompass military assistance to help beleaguered States deal with armed non-state actors threatening both the State and its population" (UNSG, 2009). In this regard, R2P is entirely consistent with, and seeks to build on, earlier UN reports that have identified preventive deployment of peace operations in the early stages of unrest as an important component of the Security Council's tools for preventing conflict and maintaining international peace and security (Brahimi, 2000). Despite long-standing UN recommendations to utilise preventive deployment, there has been little progress towards implementing such a vision. In fact, the UN Security Council's approach to conflict situations has continued to be reactive in nature, intervening only after societies have

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disintegrated and full-scale conflict has broken out (Breau, 2012). This is despite the R2P's explicit emphasis on preventive action to assist states under stress could provide an opportunity to finally realise the potential of preventive deployment.

Preventive deployment usually consist of 'multi-faceted operations with at least three constitutive pillars-military, political and socio-economic' (Stamnes, 2011:19). In addition, given that every R2P situation will be based on its own set of historical, political and cultural circumstances, each preventive deployment should be specifically tailored to those conditions on a case-by-case basis. However, existing UN peace forces are not trained to identify the risks of, or respond to genocide and other mass atrocity crimes due to limited capacity. The UN Secretary-General acknowledged that current UN missions are 'constrained by limited resources, competing mandated priorities, and operating areas that are confined by national borders' (UNSG, 2011).

c) Non-coercive Measures of the Responsibility to Protect

Article 34 of the UN Charter gives the Security Council the power to "investigate any dispute, or any situation that might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute, in order to determine whether the continuation of the dispute or situation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security". While this investigative function remains under-utilised, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2011 referred to Article 34 as a basis for a range of non-coercive preventive measures in the face of impending crises (UNSG, 2011). Two of the tools mentioned by the Secretary-General are the use of preventive diplomacy and mediation to de-escalate situations where mass atrocity crimes are looming as well as the deployment of fact-finding missions or human rights monitors. Kenya stands as an example of the successful employment of such preventive tools in an R2P context (Evans, 2010). Early action by African Union mediators with the support of the United Nations and civil society actors contributed to the reduction of post-election violence. The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P, 2010:2) described the international engagement in the Kenyan crisis as a model of "how non-coercive tools, such as mediation, can help halt atrocities when employed early with sufficient resources and international support". Others such as Bellamy (2010) have however suggested that the African Union's involvement, rather than R2P, was the major catalyst for international engagement with Kenya. Nevertheless, it should be appreciated that R2P strategies played a role in the international community's diplomatic response as non-coercive tools were effective in diffusing mounting violence in Kenya.

The second form of non-coercive preventive action is the deployment of fact-finding missions or human rights monitors in the face of mounting violence. Such missions have the potential of contributing towards the protection of civilians. For instance, the presence of international players on the ground may help to de-escalate a volatile situation and contribute to a decrease in violence. Evans (2011) cites the example of the 2005 establishment of a UN human rights monitoring field operation in Nepal as contributing to a "dramatic reduction in violations, with summary executions and disappearances nearly eliminated". According to Weinstein (2007) where the presence of a UN mission is not sufficient to prevent violence from increasing, such field operations may still be able to operate as a valuable source of information-gathering and reporting for R2P early-warning systems. By sounding the alarm bells on possible mass atrocity crimes, such a mission could contribute to the mobilisation of political support for more robust international assistance involving coercive measures.

d) International Debates on the R2P

There has been a series of efforts to operationalise R2P both within the reasoning as well as the daily work of institutions aimed at building political support for the concept (De Franco, 2015). The R2P is a principled norm that does not create precise legal obligations and therefore its implementation is largely dependent on practice and precedence (Betts & Orchard, 2014). According to Welsh (2014) the R2P is a complex norm containing more than one set of prescriptions, which not only apply to different actors (for example in Pillar One, national governments, and in the case of Pillars Two and Three, to various international actors), but also exist at different levels of specificity. This means that there are substantial variations in the degree and nature of implementation of different prescriptions and that one set of prescriptions therefore may become more heavily 'weighted' in the overall understanding of the norm. Welsh (2014:136) rightly stresses that "whether or not military intervention occurs is not an appropriate test for effectiveness. The R2P's core function as a norm is to emphasise what is appropriate and to shine a spotlight on what is deemed inappropriate". R2P's strength should be measured by the degree to which notions of protection are invoked by international actors during times of real or imminent crisis. The R2P should also be measured on how it serves as a catalyst for debate. Therefore what the second and third pillars of R2P demand is a 'duty of conduct' by members of the international community to identify when atrocity crimes are being committed (or when there is threat thereof) and to deliberate on how the three pillar framework might apply" (Bellamy in Welsh, 2014).

Many interventions have been falsely justified in terms of humanitarianism and in turn tarnished the credibility of the norm (Wheeler, 2000). Moreover,

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Stuenkel (2014:11) observes how literature relating to the use of force tends to crudely differentiate between the 'pro-interventionist Global North and a pro-sovereignty Global South. This can be attributed to the fact that military intervention has often been deemed as representing a 'Trojan horse' (Weiss, 2004). Exhorting an appearance of humanitarian concern while concealing neo-imperialist strategic interests; the legacy of the 2003 Iraq invasion best demonstrates this perception. While R2P does not alter pre-existing norms, rooting itself in international law regarding the coercive use of force when operationalised R2P directly violates conventional understandings of territorial integrity and sovereign independence. Notably, the third and final pillar of R2P stipulates that certain provisions ought to be met prior to implementation. Traditionally, the use of force for the defence of human rights has been challenged by legal and moral discussions regarding issues of legitimacy and selectivity. In this sense, non-adherence, as Hehir (2012:207) argues, can be understood as being due to the misuse of the duty to intervene, rather than defending sovereignty as an absolute inviolability irreconcilable with humanitarian interventionism.

It should be appreciated that there is currently no single world system which could effectively implement the R2P. As observed in the Libyan scenario, different elements are implemented by different actors at different levels. The fragmentation and divisions at regional and global level regarding the R2P that presently exist fuels criticism against application of R2P. The UN has also demonstrated its inability to implement its own resolution on the R2P due to significant resource gap. The UN does not have the military means for a rapidly deployable R2P operations and therefore delegate the implementation to militarily more capable actors most of whom it has practically no oversight control. This has tended to weaken the implementation of the R2P.

e) The Syrian Conflict

The Syrian conflict erupted in March 2011 after the torture of some students who had painted anti-government *graffiti* (Thakur, 2013). The anti-government protests grew steadily across Syria as tens of thousands of Syrians demanded extensive reforms as well as the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. Faced with growing uprising, the Syrian government resorted to unleashing violence against the protesters while also banning many foreign journalists (Gifkins, 2012:375). Realising that the anti-government demonstrations continued to persist, the Syrian government adopted a harsher strategy and bombarded the city of Dera where the protests broke out (Thakur, 2013). In 2012 the growing unrest reached Damascus, the capital city and later Aleppo before becoming a fully-fledged civil war. The protestors were demanding more freedom and political and economic reforms (Allison, 2013). According to Hansson (2014) Syria became a battlefield between governmental forces and rebels following the crackdown on protestors by military forces in 2011.

By mid 2011, a number of opposition groups were formed against the Assad regime in Syria. The Syrian National Council (SNC) created in Turkey in October 2011 is the largest opposition group (Trenin, 2013:6). The SNC has pursued a total regime change agenda in Syria and called on the international community to intervene. The SNC established the Free Syrian Army (FSA) which includes deserters from military forces and rebellious civilians. The goal of the FSA was to overthrow the Assad regime (ICRtoP, 2013). The establishment of a rebel army led to the breakdown of dialogue aimed at preventing the outbreak of a civil war. By the end of 2011, the Syrian government had lost control of many cities and the conflict had also evolved into a major civil war among ethnic, sectarian and ideological groupings (Gifkins, 2012:375). Many different minorities, such as the Alawites, Christians and Kurds took up arms in order to protect their villages in case of repercussions for historical reasons by other minorities or even the majority Sunni in an effort to establish autonomous regions.

It is important to also appreciate that Assad's refusal to relinquish power gave rise to the creation and competition of two axis. The pro-Assad axis consist of Russia, China, Iran Venezuela and North Korea while the anti-Assad axis consists of the United States of America, European countries, Turkey and some Arab states (ICRtoP, 2013). These two axis have been supporting either the Assad regime or the rebels in accordance with their own interests. In fact, Syria has become a regional and international battlefield with various groups with very different ideologies involved in a multi-layered conflict (ICRto P, 2013). Since the Syrian conflict began in 2011, over 280,000 people have been killed (The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2016). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that as of October 2016, there were over 4.8 million Syrian refugees and at least 6.1 million internally displaced persons, which is the largest number of people displaced by any conflict in the world (The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2016).

The United Nations Human Rights Council-mandated Commission of Inquiry has asserted that the Syrian government forces have committed crimes against humanity as a matter of state policy. Syrian government air strikes in residential areas have breached the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2139, which demanded all parties to cease attacks on civilians and the use of indiscriminate weapons (The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2016). The Commission of Inquiry has reported that government-allied militias and other pro-

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government forces have also conducted widespread attacks on the population, committing crimes against humanity, including extermination, murder, rape or other forms of sexual violence, torture, imprisonment, enforced disappearance and other inhumane activities (The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2016). Numerous armed opposition groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq, have also committed war crimes, violating international humanitarian law by targeting religious minorities through mass killings and sexual enslavement. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, between June 2014 and October 2016, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria executed 4,500 people, including nearly 2,450 civilians (The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2016).

The Syrian government has not been able to stop mass atrocities and has also committed most of them. The international community has not been able to prevent further escalation of the conflict or to create a common approach to the Syrian crisis, arguably as a result of Russian and Chinese vetoes of every proposed resolution in the UN Security Council (Human Rights Commission, 2012). The danger and illegitimacy of Western interventions in previous instances are repeatedly used by Russia and China as examples illustrating the negative consequences unilateral action could result in. Trenin (2013:6) argues that the NATO-led intervention in Libya and the subsequent removal of Gaddafi damaged Western credibility in the minds of the Russian authorities. The intervention in Libya, for instance according to the Russian leaders had shown that when certain states take it in their own hands to act beyond the UN mandate, it not only damages the responsibility of the UN to deal collectively and multilaterally with threats to peace and security, but it also leads to chaos.

Due to the persisting humanitarian crisis in Syria which is immense, there is an opportunity for the international community to utilise the R2P to restore peace and security in the country. The R2P principle notwithstanding some of the apparent challenges remains an effective mechanism for shaping humanitarian intervention and stopping mass atrocities occurring daily in Syria. The Assad regime in Syria has not only immensely failed to abide by Pillar One of R2P, but also bears primary responsibility for the ongoing commission of mass atrocities and crimes, exacerbated by their refusal of Pillar Three involving intervention. As hostile divisions thrive within Syria, the UNSC continues to fail in enforcing compliance with intervention. Outside political influence, including western liberal democracies and the wider Middle Eastern regional powers, continue to weaken Syria's chances of ceasing hostilities.

f) Role of the UNSC in the Syrian Crisis

Taking into account the multiple use of the veto by Russia and China in Syria, it is imperative to analyse the use of the veto in such situations. The veto goes back to the founding of the UN in 1945 and was seen as a way of enticing the Great Powers into the UN (Evans, 2013). Overtime, the veto, and the threat of a veto, has given the powers major leverage that they have never been willing to limit in any previous UN reform package. This view was eloquently articulated by the Russian President Vladimir Putin who wrote to a Russian and foreign audience indicating that; "Let me remind you that the veto right is not a whim but an integral part of the global system codified in the UN Charter" (Zongze, 2012). The UNSC is a political body which gives major power to its five permanent members namely; United States of America, Britain, France, China and Russia. More often than not, its voting rules have ended in stalemate. This has been a major reason why both humanitarian intervention and R2P have been perceived as politically driven and selective because of the workings of the UNSC.

Importantly, the authorisation and enforcement of R2P rests firmly with the UNSC. This status is derived from the UN Charter which has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security (United Nations Charter Article 24). The UNSC is the one that assesses whether there is a threat to peace, breach of peace or an act of aggression and also decides whether and what kind of measures (without or with force) should be taken to deal with the situation (United Nations Charter Articles 39, 41 and 42). In addition, through United Nations Charter Article 25) all UN member states agreed to accept and carry out decisions of the UNSC. Furthermore, the R2P is considered to be a normative standard and a moral imperative of the international community hence paragraph 139 of the World Summit Outcome Document (2005) recognises that the UNSC has the authority to invoke the R2P. Calls for restricting or even eliminating the veto available to the five-permanent member states of the UNSC are as old as the UN itself.

The former Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in his Report on the R2P in 2011 urged the permanent members "to refrain from employing or threatening to employ the veto in situations of manifest failure" in order to meet their obligations concerning R2P and therefore called them to "a mutual understating to that effect" (Glanville, 2012:325). France holds the belief that the permanent membership and the veto should not be considered a privilege but a responsibility. Therefore, the UNSC should be an institution that finds solutions and not one that will paralyse them. The United Kingdom generally support the idea not to use its veto in cases of mass atrocities. The USA accepts R2P including the issue of military intervention. Bearing in mind the vast military power that the USA enjoys before other countries, it does not want to be restricted or controlled by the UNSC. Even when the UNSC confirms USA's position, USA tends to reserve itself the role of

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arbiter of the Council. Hence, USA does not want any type of restriction to its veto (Evans, 2013). It is by far the most influential UN member state as it sets the UN agenda, and its policy on R2P will continue to be the most decisive in conditioning the UN's record of R2P implementation (Glanville, 2012).

Zongze (2012) points out that Arab and Western countries introduced draft resolutions in October 2011 as well as in 2012 calling for an end to the flow of arms into Syria. President Bashar al Assad was requested to yield key power to a deputy, to have a government of national unity, and for preparations to hold free presidential and parliamentary elections. China and Russia have however vetoed all these resolutions as they are opposed to any resolution which could set off a chain of events leading to one similar to UNSC Resolution 1973 that authorised military intervention in Libya. The two countries have further advanced several arguments that such a resolution would put Syria on the path to civil war; the Security Council should not dictate internal politics and succession; and the only solution to the Syrian crisis is through an inclusive, Syrian led process to address the legitimate aspirations of the people in an environment free of violence and human rights abuses (Garwood-Gowers, 2012).

It is also interesting to note that Russian has been the most explicit about the connection of Libya and Syria. It has repeatedly stated that it will not accept a "Libya-style" solution for Syria. The Russian President, Putin even went further to point out that; "Learning from that bitter experience, we are against any UNSC resolutions that could be interpreted as a signal for military interference in the domestic processes of Syria" (Putin, 2012). It is also not difficult to appreciate that Russia has long-standing ties with Syria and sees these ties as a way to keep Russian influence in Middle East discussions including selling Syria military supplies and having a naval base in Syria. According to Russia, the veto is an 'indispensable element of the international system which ensures checks and balances' and also stimulates members to seek compromise and consensus. Furthermore, the veto is a safeguard to the UN against 'doubtful undertakings' such as the use of force over Kosovo in 1999 and in Iraq in 2003 or the 'pushing of Syria towards collapse' (Garwood-Gowers, 2012). Additionally, Russia believes that not vetoing Libya led to the bombing and toppling of the 'legitimate government' hence continues to stoutly resist efforts to authorise any robust resolution for dealing with the Syrian crisis.

China has rather strict and traditional understanding regarding state sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs. It supports Pillar 1 of the R2P and calls for a 'constructive assistance' with regards to Pillar II on the part of the international community by respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the host country (Zongze, 2012). With regards to Pillar 1 and Pillar II, Libya has been referred as "a negative case study" (Garwood-Gowers, 2012). Zongze (2012) further argues that Libya demonstrated how the R2P proved nothing more than the pursuit of hegemony in the name of humanity hence Russia and China have used a double veto in the Security Council to block even mild punishments for Syria. China therefore calls for a peaceful solution first in Syria and only supports the use of force if that is conducted in a prudent way, authorised by the Security Council and on a case-by-case basis.

It is important to state that there is heightened caution about Western invasion of Syria on the pretext of R2P. The R2P raises international consciousness but does not significantly improve the international response to humanitarian crises. In this regard, it is prudent to strengthen international law based on obligations rather than discretionary rights. The threat of vetoes has led to repeated efforts to water down resolutions, for example by taking out any mention of the word sanctions. This reinforces the fact that with current UN rules, future R2P resolutions are likely to be blocked, or to be so toothless that they put little additional pressure on states.

g) Importance of using the R2P principle in shaping military intervention in Syria

The use of the R2P principle in shaping military intervention in Syria is noble as it was designed to halt or avert the suffering of defenceless minorities by state or sub-state groups. However, R2P has not been objectively implemented in states torn by conflicts due to inter-play of factors on the international arena. Furthermore, the R2P becomes important if interventions address the root-cause of the conflict but in many instances it falls short if one looks at the Libyan case in 2011. The intervention by NATO created a security vacuum instead of achieving security. In situations like the one in Syria, only military intervention can directly put a stop to the massacre of civilians. The military intervention is a key tool for preventing escalation of conflict and massacre of civilians by the Syrian government and the opposition forces. It is quite apparent that non-military measures, such as, diplomatic efforts, economic sanctions, travel bans, and arms embargo, have failed to bring to an end the conflict in Syria and in particular the mass atrocities of innocent civilians. Surely, it is clear that military intervention is required to stop the aggressive attacks on civilians in Syria. The international community cannot continue to cling onto failed efforts to justify its lack of action. By not invoking the deployment of military forces under R2P, the United Nations Security Council is failing to uphold its international mandate of maintaining world peace through protecting defenceless populations across the world.

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h) Causes of the Syrian conflict

The Captain from ZNA pointed out that:

> *The causes of the Syrian conflict are multi-faceted ranging from clash of interests of the Great Powers (Russia and America), interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state, dictatorship, repressions, good governance, and regime change agenda by Western governments (especially the USA for its ultra-motives).*

The other research participants highlighted during interviews that the civil war in Syria can be attributed to the lack of economic, social and political freedoms amongst the populace. Crimes against humanity and violations of human rights are being committed through uprisings, anti-government protests or civil wars. Thus, thousands of civilian people are being killed in furtherance of personal agendas.

These views above are also supported by the findings made by Thakur (2013) who noted that the Syrian conflict erupted in March 2011 after the torture of some students who had painted anti-government graffiti. The anti-government protests grew steadily across Syria as tens of thousands of Syrians demanded extensive reforms as well as the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. Faced with growing uprising, the Syrian government resorted to unleashing violence against the protesters while also banning many foreign journalists (Gifkins, 2012:375). Realising that the anti-government demonstrations were persisting, the Syrian government adopted a harsher strategy and bombarded Dera, the city where the protests broke out (Thakur, 2013). In 2012, the growing unrest reached Damascus, the capital city and later Aleppo before becoming a fully-fledged civil war. The protestors were demanding more freedom and political and economic reforms (Allison, 2013).According to Hansson (2014), Syria became a battlefield between governmental forces and rebels following a crackdown on protestors by military forces in 2011.

Since the Syrian conflict, in 2011, approximately, over 280,000 people have been killed (The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2016). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that as at October 2016, there were over 4.8 million Syrian refugees and at least 6.1 million internally displaced persons, which is the largest number of people displaced by any conflict in the world (The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2016).It can hence be deduced from the views of these three research participants that the causes of conflict in Syria are socially, economically, politically and religiously motivated. These include ethnic cleansing, lack of good governance, corruption as well as unemployment, among a host of factors.

i) Merits of the R2P principle in humanitarian intervention

An interview with the Chief Superintendent of ZRP revealed that:

> *From an internal security view point, the R2P acts as a way of preventing mass atrocities and violation of human rights as well as the commission of war crimes in Syria. The role of the police and or military personnel is to ensure that the most cherished values and beliefs, way of life, institutions of governance and unity, welfare as well as well-being of a nation are protected and continuously enhanced. Hence, in the Syrian context, these can only be achieved through military intervention using the R2P principle.*

This view was also stressed by the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who said that the best form of protection is prevention. According to him, prevention saves lives as well as resources (UNSG, 2011). Similarly, Breau (2007) acknowledges that while others disagree with this view, in practice, preventive action has remained an under-utilized part of the R2P norm (Breau, 2007).

The official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Desk responsible for Asia also pointed out that:

> *The R2P principle by its very nature enables mobilisation of political support particularly when the state has failed to play its part. Without the assistance of other outsiders, the concerned nation is unable to deal or to suppress conflict arising to such an extent that it reaches unbearable levels.*

The Captain from Zimbabwe National Army however did not see any value in the R2P as he pointed out that:

> *There are no merits in using the R2P in Syria since the conflict shows the manifestations of a third hand and in particular attempts to further a regime change agenda. The West led by the United States are demanding for the stepping down of Basshir Alassad which completely defeats the notion of R2P. It is surprising to note that the same Western forces are clandestinely financing the opposition/rebellion in Syria. In fact, the West's double standards led by the USA defeats the very notion of R2P gospel they preach.*

The differing views above are partially in tandem with a study by Bellamy (2009) who emphasised that the major contribution of the R2P is to advance the protection of the civilians through the mobilization of political support for operational preventive action in circumstances where a state is willing but unable to fulfil its obligations under the First Pillar of the R2P. Where there are initial signs of violence that threatens civilians, R2P may act as the catalyst for the international community to offer timely assistance to a state to

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stabilise a volatile situation before it escalates to the point of mass atrocity crimes.

j) Demerits of the R2P principle in humanitarian intervention

Commenting on the demerits of the R2P in humanitarian intervention, the Chief Superintendent from ZRP noted that:

> *The major weakness of the R2P is that UN peacekeeping operations should only be authorised when the consent of the host government has been obtained. In view of that, the conflict has continued to escalate without any intervention from the UNSC.*

In support of this view, Breau (2007) put it this way, the decisive international action to protect civilians has usually been taken only after full-scale conflict or mass violence has erupted. Likewise, Bellamy (2009) affirmed that where there are initial signs of violence that threatens civilians, R2P may act as the catalyst for the international community to offer timely assistance to a state to stabilize a volatile situation before it escalates to the point of mass atrocity crimes. However, international involvement only occurs with the consent of the state and when forcefully it directly violates conventional understandings of territorial integrity and sovereign independence (Weiss, 2004).

In the same vein, the Captain from the ZNA pointed out that:

> *The demerits of the R2P lie in the principle's inability to embrace its broader aspects and view it as a military intervention strategy applied only when the conflict has reached unprecedented levels. The R2P encompasses instruments like early warning, conflict prevention, mediation, good governance as well as even peace building and reconciliation, but, alas, all these are not utilised.*

The above assertion is in agreement with that of Evans (2011) who pointed out that despite the emphasis that R2P has much broader aspects, there is nevertheless a persistent and widespread perception that R2P is essentially synonymous with military action in response to mass atrocities. Indeed, the elastic nature of the R2P definition has sometimes created confusion. This unfortunately contributes to resistance ofthe R2P by some quarters and has also led to a tendency to overlook the importance of non-military efforts to mitigate mass atrocities.

The above view by the Captain from ZNA was supported by Ministry of Foreign Affairs official from the International Affairs Desk responsible for Asia respondent put across that:

> *The R2P is a complex norm that is very difficult to implement to dissimilar conflicts that arise in different nations and is not backed by a legal obligation to act. Its application is depended on precedence. In addition, the effective implementation of the R2P is greatly hampered by the divisions and fragmentations that exist between nations at regional and global levels which affect the provision of resources and expertise in the event of a conflict.*

Betts and Orchard (2014) buttressed the above statement by asserting that the R2P is a principled norm that does not create precise legal obligations and therefore its implementation is largely depended on practice and precedence According to Welsh (2014), the R2P is a complex norm containing more than one set of prescriptions, which not only apply to different actors but also exist at different levels of specificity. This means that there are substantial variations in the degree and nature of implementation of different prescriptions and that one set of prescriptions therefore may become more heavily 'weighted' in the overall understanding of the norm. Welsh (2014:136) rightly stresses that 'whether or not military intervention occurs is not an appropriate test for effectiveness'.

As was established by Hehir (2012) in his study that it should be appreciated that currently there is no single world system which could effectively implement the R2P. As observed in the Libyan scenario, different elements were implemented by different actors at different levels. The fragmentation, divisions at regional and global level regarding the R2P that presently exist fuels criticism against application of R2P. The UN has also demonstrated its inability to implement its own resolution on the R2P due to significant resource gap. The UN does not have the military means for a rapidly deployable R2P operations and thus delegates the implementation to militarily more capable actors most of whom it has practically no oversight control. In that regard, this has tended to weaken the implementation of the R2P.

From these assertions, it can therefore be concluded that the demerits of the R2P principle in humanitarian intervention include the need for approval by the state concerned in order to invoke the R2P to deal with conflicts, the inability of the R2P to embrace the broader aspects of not only using the military as the humanitarian intervention strategy to avert conflict from reaching unprecedented levels. Furthermore, the R2P principle is viewed as a complex norm that is very difficult to implement in dissimilar conflicts states especially with the fact that the invoking of the R2P should be backed by a legal obligation to act. Rather, its application is depended on practice and precedence. In addition, the effective implementation of the R2P is greatly hampered by the divisions and fragmentations that exist between nations at regional and global levels, this in turn, affect the provision of resources and expertise in the event of a conflict.

k) Self-interests of the United Nations Security Council members in the Syrian crisis

According to the views by the Chief Superintendent from ZRP,

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The self-interests of the UNSC members in the Syrian crisis have been a major reason why both humanitarian interventions under the R2Phavefailed. The UNSC members have been perceived to be politically driven and tend to selectively apply interventions or norms in accordance with their interests as opposed to international world peace. This is evidenced by continued use of vetoes by Russia and China against any military interventions during the six year war in Syria.

The official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Desk responsible for Asia highlighted that:

The self- interests of the UNSC members in the Syrian crisis has been characterised by divisions amongst the permanent members, (P5). Due to these divergent interests concrete action to end the conflict has not been undertaken. In response to the crisis in Syria, Russia has refused to side with the terms of Western permanent members of the UN Security Council, it has opposed any policy aimed at dictating the political process in Syria, especially those policies that could result in a military intervention or regime change. Resultantly, till to date, Russia has effectively prevented the endorsement of an intervention in Syria, despite calls by others. Together with China, Russia has vetoed three UN resolutions directed at Syria, and has repelled any pressure on the Syrian government. In light of that, the P5 has failed to act collectively and to find a solution that could prevent further escalation of the conflict in Syria.

The Captain from the Zimbabwe National Army also pointed out that:

None of the R2P principle in the Syrian conflict is irrelevant as the dynamic politics of the P5 are the very cause of the escalation of hostilities. While the West supports and arms the rebels, the East supports and arms the Syrian government. Furthermore, by continuously vetoing ceasefire proposals, some members of the P5 are grossly abusing their veto power for their interests. The world is witnessing how the P5 only unite if their interests are not affected as in the Libyan case. The Syrian crisis also illustrates an interesting point especially to Russia and America's approaches to military interventions. The selective application of international norms by the P5 demonstrate the difficulty of diffusing conflicts especially were the interests of these powerful countries are concerned. To this end, mediation by neutral third parties acceptable to both the rebels and the Syrian government can bring the warring parties to the negotiating table. Dialogue can resolve the Syrian conflict especially if it seeks to foster a power sharing and inclusive Government of National Unity (GNU).

The views above are supported by Zongze (2012) who noted that the U.N. Security Council is a political body which gives major power to its five permanent members. More often than not, its voting rules have ended in stalemate. This has been a major reason why both humanitarian intervention and R2P, have been remained to be politically driven and selective because of the workings of the U.N. Security Council. Zongze (2012) further points out that Arab and Western countries introduced draft resolutions in October 2011 as well as in 2012 calling for an end to the flow of arms into Syria, that President Bashar al/Assad to yield key power to a deputy, for a government of national unity, and for preparations to hold free presidential and parliamentary elections. China and Russia have however vetoed all these resolutions as they resolutely opposed to any resolution which could set off a chain of events leading to one similar to UNSC Resolution 1973 that authorised military intervention in Libya. The two countries have further advanced several arguments that such a resolution, would put Syria on the path to civil war; the Security Council should not dictate internal politics and succession; and the only solution to the Syrian crisis is through an inclusive, Syrian led process to address the legitimate aspirations of the people in an environment free of violence and human rights abuses (Garwood-Gowers, 2012).

It is also interesting to note that Russian has been the most explicit about the connection of Libya and Syria. It has repeatedly stated that it will not accept a 'Libya-style' solution for Syria. The Russian President, Putin even went further to point out that; "Learning from that bitter experience, we are against any UN Security Council resolutions that could be interpreted as a signal for military interference in the domestic processes of Syria" ("Russia's Putin, 2012). It is also not difficult to appreciate that Russia has long-standing ties with Syria and sees these ties as a way to keep Russian influence in Middle East discussions including selling Syria military supplies and having a naval base in Syria. According to Russia, the veto is an 'indispensable element of the international system which ensures checks and balances' and also stimulates members to seek compromise and consensus. Furthermore, the veto is a safeguard to the UN against 'doubtful undertakings' such as the use of force over Kosovo in 1999, in Iraq in 2003 or the 'pushing of Syria towards collapse' (Garwood-Gowers, 2012). Additionally, Russia believes that not vetoing Libya led to the bombing and toppling of the 'legitimate government' hence continues to stoutly resist efforts to authorise any robust resolution for dealing with the Syrian crisis.

China has rather strict and traditional understanding regarding state sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs, China supports Pillar 1 of the R2P and in regard to Pillar 2, the country continues to call for a 'constructive assistance' on the

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part of the international community by respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the host country (Zongze, 2012). An editorial in the People's Daily referred to Libya as 'a negative case study' (Garwood-Gowers, 2012). Zongze (2012) further argues that Libya demonstrated how the R2P proved nothing more than the pursuit of hegemony in the name of humanity hence Russia and China have used a double veto in the Security Council to block even mild punishments for Syria. China therefore calls for a peaceful solutionfirst in Syria and only supports the use of force if that is conducted in a prudent way, authorised by the Security Council and on a case-by-case basis.

V. Conclusions

The R2P principle is an important norm which should be invoked in shaping military intervention in Syria has become paramount in order to save many innocent Syrian civilians from mass atrocities in the protracted civil war. This finding is in sync with the United Nations General Assembly World Summit Outcome Document (2005) which articulated that the R2P approach assigns states the primary responsibility to protect its citizens from war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing. However, the Syrian conflict demonstrates that the application of R2P principle has been selective. The relative inaction of the UNSC in Syria cast a deep shadow on the future of the R2P principle.

The study findings have revealed that the causes of the Syrian conflict are multi-faceted as they range from social, economic, political and religious factors. They include ethnic cleansing, dictatorship, repressions, lack of good governance, corruption, unemployment, among others. The conflict has further been perpetuated due to clash of interests among the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council some of whom are furthering what appears to be a regime change agenda in Syria. The above findings are in sync with the observations made by Thakur (2013) were he noted that the Syrian conflict erupted in March 2011 after the torture of some students who had painted anti-government graffiti.

The merits of the R2P outweigh its demerits. The merits of the R2P make it a vital norm in preventing the commission of mass atrocities in conflict torn states such as Syria. Furthermore, the R2P principle calls for the intervention of the international community particularly when the country concerned has failed to play its part in stopping the atrocities being committed. The use of the military intervention however should be invoked as a last resort if all other instruments have failed to achieve peace. The above findings are supported by Thakur (2013) who is of the view that military intervention or threats thereof can indeed be useful tools for preventing or halting mass atrocities.

The study findings have also revealed that despite the R2P having some advantages it also has some demerits. These include that UN peacekeeping operations should only be authorised when the consent of the host government has been obtained. In view of such a scenario, the conflict thus continues to escalate. The R2P is no doubt a complex norm that is very difficult to implement in various conflicts that arise in different nations and is not backed by any legal obligation to act. This is supported by Welsh (2014) who noted that the R2P is a complex norm containing more than one set of prescriptions, which cannot be uniformly applied to differing conflicts. Its application is depended on precedence. In addition, the effective implementation of the R2P is greatly hampered by the divisions and fragmentations that exist between nations at regional and global levels which affect the provision of resources and expertise in the event of a conflict. It is essential for UN member states to first exhaust various components like early warning, conflict prevention, mediation as well as even peace building and reconciliation. Evans (2011) disputes the widespread perception that R2P is synonymous with military action as the R2P has much broader aspects which can be effectively exploited. This has resulted in the R2P being applied selectively and inconsistently by powerful Western states in furthering a regime change agenda. The R2P principle does not create precise legal obligations and therefore its implementation is largely depended on practice and precedence (Betts & Orchard, 2014). There is no doubt that the R2P is not an international legal rule hence its implementation largely depends on the political decisions of the United Nations Security Council which cannot be enforced without the consent of its members. The enforcement has on many occasions been impeded by a veto of a member of the P5.

The self-interests of the UNSC members in the Syrian crisis have been a major reason why both humanitarian interventions under R2Phave failed. The UNSC members have been perceived to be politically driven and tend to selectively apply interventions or norms in accordance with their self-interests as opposed to international world peace. This is evidenced by continued use of vetoes by Russia and China against any military interventions during the six year war in Syria. The conflict in Syria has left the world in a quandary especially when the Security Council fails to act in the case of mass atrocity. Zongze (2012) noted that China supports 'constructive assistance' on the part of the international community by respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the host country. Garwood-Gowers (2012) is of the view that Russia believes that not vetoing Libya led to the bombing and toppling of the "legitimate government" hence continues to stoutly resist efforts to authorize any robust resolution for dealing with the Syrian crisis. China has rather strict and

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traditional understanding regarding state sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs

The self-interests of the UNSC members in the Syrian crisis have been characterised by divisions amongst the permanent members (P5). In response to the crisis in Syria, Russia has refused to side with proposals by Western permanent members of the UN Security Council aimed at dictating the political process in Syria, especially those that could result in a military intervention or regime change. Similarly, Russia has also prevented the endorsement of an intervention in Syria, despite calls by others. Together with China, Russia has vetoed three UN resolutions against Syria. The P5 has failed to act collectively in find a lasting solution that could prevent further escalation of the Syrian conflict. Given the dynamics of the UNSC it may be necessary for a regional organisation or coalition to authorise and undertake the limited use of force to protect populations from mass atrocities.

VI. Recommendations

The United Nations needs to urgently invoke military intervention under the R2P in order to end the mass atrocities in Syria. The R2P principle calls for the intervention of the international community particularly when the country concerned has failed to play its part in stopping the atrocities being committed. The use of the military intervention however should be invoked as a last resort if all other instruments have failed to achieve peace.

The United Nations member-states should become norm implementers in order to protect the credibility of the R2P. It is the responsibility of the member states to protect the credibility of the R2P through being norm implementers. There is need for the UN Security Council to be reformed as its current structure places disproportionate amount of power and influence of the international community in the hands of a mere five nations. The argument of many critics of the United Nations Security Council is that it is not effective and that it needs to be fundamentally reformed. The loudest calls for reform come from those who believe that the inclusion of a host of new permanent members is the answer to the effectiveness deficit. Others argue that it is folly to suggest that the addition of new permanent members would amount to meaningful reform.

The UNSC members to take greater care to consider geopolitical implications of intervention; steps including writing more detail into how R2P-related resolutions should be implemented and by whom. The work of the United Nations impacts people around the world on issues related to peace and security and hence the need to create common ground in coming up with the way the Responsibility to Protect Principle related resolutions should be executed.

The United Nations member-states and regional organizations such as African Union, European Union, among others to impose sanctions and diplomatic pressure on governments committing atrocities against their own populations. It should be noted that sovereignty not only gives a state the right to control its affairs, it also confers on the state primary responsibility for protecting the people within its borders. It was proposed that when a State fails to protect its people either through lack of ability or a lack of willingness the responsibility shifts to the broader international community.

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