

Responsibility to Protect in the Real World: A Tale of Two Countries
Keynote Address by Donald Steinberg, President of World Learning
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Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great honor to be here this evening to help launch the report, “The United States and R2P – From Words to Action,” a combined effort of the U.S. Institute of Peace, the U.S. Holocaust Museum, and the Brookings Institution.

I want to begin by saluting Secretary Madeleine Albright, Ambassador Richard Williamson, and the members and staff of the commission for coming together in the best non-partisan tradition to address an issue that transcends politics. As with the Albright/Cohen report on atrocity prevention several years ago, for which I served as a working group member, this report can be a game changer if we heed its wise counsel and follow its recommendations.

Throughout my 38 years in diplomacy and development, issues of atrocity prevention and conflict resolution have dominated my career: from my first diplomatic assignment in the Central African Republic; to the transition from apartheid to non-racial democracy in South Africa; to the witches brew of civil war and ethnic killings in Rwanda and Angola; and more recently, to Libya, Sudan and South Sudan, Kenya and Syria.

Too frequently, faced with the unfinished agenda in consolidating the R2P norm and with our collective inability to prevent or stop the violence in Syria, the two Sudans, the DRC and elsewhere, we forget how much has been achieved in the dozen short years since R2P emerged on the scene – first from the IDP world in the form of “sovereignty as responsibility,” and later in the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, sponsored by Canada under the leadership of Lloyd Axworthy, who is here this evening.

The progress can be measured not just by the insertion of a couple of paragraphs into the World Summit Outcome document in 2005, or the creation of the US government’s Atrocity Prevention Board, or the welcome if unfulfilled promises of “never again” and “not on my watch.” It can also be measured by our willingness and capacity to respond to situation like Kenya, Libya and Cote d’Ivoire.

Kenya: R2P in Action

Let’s go back four years to watch R2P in action. In 2009, I was serving as deputy president of International Crisis Group under R2P “guru” Gareth Evans.

On January 2, a week after the failed Kenyan elections, I sent a message throughout our network. It read in part:

The burning of the church in Eldoret with three dozen Kikuyus inside; the history of ethnic violence in the Rift Valley; and the hate speech prevalent among Kikuyus, Kalenjins, and Luos takes this crisis out of the usual post-electoral conflicts and puts it squarely onto the R2P stage.

While the parallels between Kenya and Rwanda can be easily overdrawn, the deterioration in other seemingly solid African countries such as Cote d’Ivoire and Zimbabwe could easily be repeated in Kenya to tragic effect. It’s time to sound the alarm bells.

Kofi Annan, John Kuofor, Graca Machel, Ben Mkapa and other African leaders engaged, backed by the willingness of the United States and the Security Council to sanction those resisting a peaceful solution.

For those who suggest that R2P is a concept being thrust on the developing world by the global North, note that those seizing the initiative and designing the outcome were Ghanaians, South Africans, and Tanzanians.

A quick-fix solution of a power sharing arrangement was designed and implemented. But instead of turning our collective gaze aside and facing the same problem in new elections in 2013, the international community stay committed to the long-term challenges present in the R2P rebuilding mandate. We insisted on constitutional and legal reform to reduce the power of the executive and overhaul the electoral system. We supported a framework to address ethnic violence and humanitarian crises; engaged civil society and the business community in governance issues; demanded accountability for crimes committed in the post-election violence; and helped dismantle ethnic militias.

Specifically, USAID created “Yes Youth Can”, which mobilized more than a million Kenyan youth to resist violence across ethnic lines. USAID, State and other agencies strengthened the Kenyan electoral commission, established local dispute mechanisms, trained poll watchers, created violence hot lines, and trained security forces in non-lethal crowd control.

The result in 2013 was a mostly peaceful election, and a sense that we didn’t just dodge a bullet, we helped build a more democratic and inclusive process – even if it paradoxically elected leaders under investigation for ethnic crimes.

I’m proud of the role that my new organization, World Learning, is playing a similar role in training a new generation of global leaders to promote peace, democracy and development through its exchange and educational programs. In particular, World Learning’s Conflict Transformation Across Cultures, or CONTACT, has brought together peace-builders from more than 60 countries to enhance their skills through a powerful process of study, self-reflection, community building, and collaborative problem solving within a multicultural learning environment.

Rwanda: R2P Inaction

For me, the actions in Kenya were particularly welcome as a contrast to the U.S. response to Rwanda a decade and a half earlier, when I was President Clinton’s special assistant for Africa. Like many of us, I will always regret that I did not challenge the common wisdom that in the wake of the Blackhawk Down incident in Mogadishu, the American people would not support American boots on the ground in another remote African location. Still, we could have done much short of sending US forces.

We could have jammed the hate language on the radio station, Mille Collines. We could have reinforced General Romeo Dallaire’s forces. We could have pressed immediately for new UN or African peacekeepers to save as many lives as possible.

But each time we pushed for these steps, others would ask: “Where’s the legal basis for these actions? Where’s the public outcry, the hallelujah chorus of support? How do we know our actions will end the killings?”

The jamming of Mille Collines was caught up in a discussion of whether it was legal under international communications law. The supply of 50 armored personnel carriers to Dallaire was fatally delayed by a debate over what color they should be painted under international law. Proposals to supply new

peacekeepers were made moot not only by the lack of ready trained forces, especially from Africa, but also by disagreements over how we would pay for their deployment. Time and again, the forces of inaction triumphed until the genocide burned itself out.

The New World of R2P

Fortunately, we've moved beyond apologies and mea culpas for the failed response to Rwanda, as well as Somalia and Bosnia. Indeed, it was in these failures of will that the roots of R2P were formed. Consider the changes.

First, the international community has increasingly engaged in preventive actions to keep societies from falling apart – including deploying more than 100,000 military, police, and civilian personnel in UN peacekeeping operations. Nearly a dozen different countries each provide more than \$100 million annually for these operations. A similar number of forces are deployed in non-UN peace operations.

Second, country after country has stepped forward militarily in potential R2P situations, such as the NATO and its allies in Libya and Kosovo, South Africans in Burundi, the British in Sierra Leone, the French in Cote d'Ivoire and Mali, the African Union in Darfur, the Americans in Macedonia, and the Australians in East Timor. Of course, we should not add to the misconception that R2P is mostly or exclusively about non-consensual military action: such action is choice of last resort, to be used in the context of efforts at diplomacy, sanctions, humanitarian assistance, naming and shaming, and the like.

Further, we have responded with institutional structures – such as the UN Peacebuilding Commission and the Global Center for R2P under the leadership of Simon Adams– to help societies to avoid falling into the genocide trap through preventive steps and to emerge from conflict through recovery and reconstruction.

Within the US government, the new kid on the block is the Atrocity Prevention Board. Again, I want to salute the Albright/Cohen commission, which formed the basis for much that the President announced at the Holocaust Museum last April and much that the APB members do on a daily basis. I was pleased to serve as a charter member of the APB – led ably first by Samantha Power and now by Steve Pomper.

The Atrocity Prevention Board

Let's talk briefly about what the APB is and what it isn't. The APB is not a quick fix method of creating political will for actions that would otherwise not be taken, nor is it a backdoor to avoid answering tough questions about military engagement, including the seriousness of the threat, the primary purpose for engagement, the need for proportionality, an assessment of the balance of consequences, and the need for UN authorization for action.

Instead, the APB's focuses on three types of situations.

First, for issues firmly on the USG foreign affairs radar screen, the APB provides expert guidance about the potential for atrocities in these situations and best practices to prevent and address them. Such situations include Syria, Sudan/South Sudan, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Iraq.

Second, the APB helps sound alarm bells in situations where the US government and the broader international community may not be paying adequate attention to emerging or potential atrocity situations – what we might call “high risk/low attention.” Such countries and regions include Kenya and elsewhere in the Horn of Africa, the Mano River states of West Africa, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian states, and the “northern triangle” in Central America.

When President Obama traveled to Myanmar last November, for example, the APB helped highlight the need to press Myanmar's leadership on human rights in general, and the potential for even greater violence in Rakhine State and in conflicts with the so-called "cease-fire groups."

We have seen the initial fruits of this engagement over the past month, including a tentative peace in the Kachin conflict and by Thein Sein's abolition of the abusive Nasaka border security force in Rakhine State along the border with Bangladesh.

Third, there is a broader set of countries and regions deserving of prevention efforts to mitigate the tensions that could give rise to atrocities, such as inter-ethnic disputes. This includes post-conflict countries, where peace-building efforts must be supported by accountability and transitional justice efforts that could alleviate tensions and foster reconciliation.

The APB is now outlining capabilities we can bring to bear in all these situations. This includes an expansion of surveillance, including interchange with NGOs, UN officials and other actors on the ground. The APB is also ensuring that U.S. government agencies provide their on-the-ground personnel with adequate resources for assessment, planning, training, conflict prevention exercises or other needs.

USAID and Atrocity Prevention: Toolkits, Training and Technology

At USAID, under the leadership of Sarah Mendelson, Mark Goldenbaum, Lawrence Woocher, and Nancy Lindborg, this means ensuring that in the darkest corners of the world, USAID's officials serve as the eyes, the ears and the conscience of the global community. Working with the State Department and other agencies, USAID is developing toolkits to provide our people with a guide to programs, interventions, strategies, surge capacity and resources available for prevention, early warning, early response and ensuring accountability.

One key is a "Direct Channel" now in place to allow staff to rapidly report their concerns to the highest level of USAID. We are indeed in a "If see something, say something" moment. State and USAID are also training personnel dealing with real or potential atrocity situations, including a two-day course at the Foreign Service Institute designed by Tori Holt and Sarah Mendelson for personnel from US government agencies serving in "at risk" posts.

In Angola in the mid-1990s, as we frequently saw killing fields with horrendous mass graves. In the middle of a fragile peace process, the country was probably not ready to address at that point, but we needed practical training in how to collect and preserve forensic evidence that would be essential once the country was ready.

Modules on atrocity prevention are also slated for regional area studies, Civilian Security and human rights courses, the Ambassadorial and DCM seminars, and the entry-level Foreign Service training.

USAID is also harnessing new technologies, and in particular how to use existing social media networks and the world's 6.5 billion cellphones to share information more quickly and broadly. USAID's three tech challenges are generating fascinating new ideas. There are tools to help companies avoid sourcing components from armed combatants and potential abusers. There are voice recognition capabilities that can monitor and target hate speech. There are data-mining technologies to cull, integrate and analyze public and private sources to reveal financial relationships and transactions that were previously hidden. USAID is supplementing these efforts with datapaloozas, crowd sourcing and hack-a-thons to generate new ideas.

If all these steps sound familiar, it's because draw heavily on the Albright-Cohen report, and many are reinforced and refined in the current report. Fortunately, plagiarism isn't classified as a war crime, except in academia and think tanks. I'd like to take this opportunity to endorse a number of the other actions recommended in the Albright-Williamson report, including:

- New funding for crisis prevention and stabilization measures,
- Enhanced efforts with the UN and like-minded countries to strengthen the global capacity to prevent atrocities,
- Greater APB outreach to civil society groups – now that I'm on this side of the table,
- New steps to improve ICC effectiveness to deter and prosecute war crimes, and
- Expanded engagement between the administration and Congress to ensure R2P implementation.

I also want to endorse the report's conclusion vis-à-vis the tragedy in Syria. Three weeks removed from the White House Sitroom meetings on Syria, it would be inappropriate and unseemly for me to go into detail.

But the report itself sums it up well:

The terrible carnage in Syria illustrates that the international community's embrace of R2P is not sufficient, in itself, to prevent a ruthless dictator from inflicting grievous harm on his own citizens, especially when the permanent members of the Security Council are divided and external military intervention is difficult. Our collective challenge is to minimize the likelihood of such situations through persistent diplomacy, support for democracy, and a greater insistence on respect for fundamental civil and human rights.

America's National Security Interest in Atrocity Prevention

In conclusion, I also agree with the report's recommendation that we collectively reinforce the message communicated at the Holocaust Museum by President Obama in April 2012, that preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest of the United States and that national sovereignty is never a license to slaughter your own people.

We need to remind our fellow citizens that countries that are peaceful, prosperous and protect the rights and well-being of their most marginalized citizens do not tend to traffic in drugs, arms, or people; they are less likely to transmit pandemic diseases and send refugees across borders and oceans; they don't harbor pirates or terrorists; and they don't require American troops on the ground.

Secretary Albright, Ambassador Williamson, thanks again for your leadership in keeping America on the right side of history. And thanks to all of you for your attention.

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