

A Sight for Sore Eyes: Bringing Gender Vision to the Responsibility to Protect Framework

ABSTRACT

The international community is currently engaged in rigorous debate over the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, a controversial framework that attempts to delineate state responsibilities in times of humanitarian crises. The R2P affirms that each state has the primary responsibility to protect its own people, but asserts that where the perpetration of genocide, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity is imminent or in process, and the state in question is unwilling or unable to halt or avert it, the responsibility to protect shifts to the international community. States and organizations external to the dispute can fulfill this responsibility by using diplomatic, humanitarian, and other methods, up to and including the use of force, to help protect the lives and human rights of civilian populations. The R2P emerges from the work of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), and comprises three distinct responsibilities for the international community of states: the responsibility to prevent; the responsibility to react; and the responsibility to rebuild. The R2P is rapidly gaining international acceptance and received endorsement at the 2005 United Nations Reform Summit.

Current formulations of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine are almost entirely gender-blind, despite the existence of multiple international mandates for integrating gender concerns into peace and security initiatives. Given recent high-level support for the R2P doctrine, and its growing salience internationally, it is imperative that this blindness be rectified. In this paper, the authors argue that existing experience and research on gender, peace and security issues can, and must, be directly incorporated into the R2P framework. Particular attention is paid to Security Council Resolution 1325, as it is the central legal obligation governing this area. The authors demonstrate how gender-sensitive perspectives can be incorporated into all three portions of the existing R2P framework and argue that their inclusion is not only required by international mandates in this area, but is essential to the successful implementation of the doctrine itself.

Jennifer Bond and Laurel Sherret