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Policy Memo

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SUBJECT: R2P: The Next Decade

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) has evolved steadily since its first articulation by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in 2001 and its political adoption at the 2005 World Summit. Recent global events—both ongoing and unanticipated—have drawn mass atrocity threats into even sharper focus, mobilized novel approaches, and raised important questions about how political commitment should be translated into concrete policies that prevent and halt atrocity violence.

On January 18, 2012, the Stanley Foundation, in partnership with the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the MacArthur Foundation, convened figures critical to the historical and contemporary evolution of the Responsibility to Protect to assess the current state of the principle and consider the evolving global dynamics that will frame, drive, and challenge policy development in the years ahead.

The event's more than 200 participants included United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; members of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty; key international, regional, and national officials; academic and policy experts; civil society figures; and journalists.

The day's dialogue revealed a striking depth of consensus in support of R2P principles.

This consensus was echoed repeatedly by state representatives and policy actors and reflected a shared understanding and acceptance of the responsibilities outlined in R2P's three-pillar framework.

The following points outline critical tasks identified by the discussion as R2P moves from political principle to policy framework in the coming decade:

Clarifying Consensus on the Use of Force

Noting the depth of current consensus on R2P principles, critiques were limited to the modes of application in particular cases. Such critiques suggest that R2P's next decade requires frank and transparent discussion among UN member states to elaborate consensus on the expectations for applying the principle's more complex, and potentially contentious, elements.

Participants troubled by the course of the NATO's Libya campaign in the wake of SCR 1973 said that the consensus that inspired this resolution was damaged by gaps in expectations, communication, and accountability between those who mandated the operation and those who implemented it. These gaps were reinforced by casual invocation of "civilian protection" language typically reserved for consensual peacekeeping operations; disregard of particular elements of the resolution, including its arms embargo and cease-fire call; withholding consideration of regime change and other implementation expectations from Security Council debate; and a general lack of reporting to the council on NATO means and methods.

The Libyan campaign generated genuine distrust among some member states over future applications of R2P-inspired mandates—a distrust that continues to haunt debate over Security Council action in Syria.

While conceding serious challenges, participants suggested that concerns reinforced by the Libya experience could be addressed constructively through candid discussion that elaborates consensus on a broad set of issues related to the Security Council and the use of force. Many welcomed the Brazilian initiative to consider "responsibility while protecting," which reflects many of the issues at the core of current concerns.

Building Capacity to Prevent and Respond

National Capacity

Participants underscored that the ultimate objective of R2P should be to ensure effective prevention at the national level. Thus a core focus of R2P's next decade must be to support the development of capacities that enable national authorities to act as the primary agents of prevention and public safety. The repeated calls to support "state responsibility" and to act preventively by investing in the development of healthy institutions that provide effective and equitable governance and security, however, highlighted a stark gap between the rhetorical emphasis on prevention and a continuing lack of attention, political will, and resources applied to capacity building and early preventive efforts. Discussion suggested that R2P's next decade will demand greater attention to determining the specific institutional capacities that most effectively buffer against atrocity risk, as well as concrete ways in which the international community can best support them.

Regional Capacity

Similar comments revolved around the role of regional and subregional organizations, whose active engagement was noted as critical to effective approaches to a diverse range of R2P-related cases since 2005. Regional engagement lends additional legitimacy to international focus, moderates tendencies for selective attention, involves those with systemic ties and diverse forms of leverage, and offers potential mechanisms for longer-term focus in the aftermath of crisis. Yet regional attention to R2P issues remains highly uneven, as does regional capacity to prevent and respond to atrocity threats. Links between the regional and international levels often fall short of their potential. R2P's next decade thus requires moving beyond rhetorical invocation of the potential inherent in regional organizations to a more concerted focus on understanding and strengthening regional capacities.

International Capacity

At the international level, many participants, including the UN secretary-general, cited the perennial challenge of matching mandates with resources. As R2P refines understanding of the policy

approaches that most effectively prevent and halt mass atrocities, member states must be willing to supply the logistical means to better ensure their implementation.

Developing and Implementing Policy

Understanding the Challenge

Grounded in solid political consensus, participants described R2P's next decade as one in which the framework outlined by the principle is translated into increasingly concrete policy approaches and objectives. This requires a better understanding of the roots of atrocity violence and the reasons it tends to manifest in particular forms against specific categories of victims. Why, for example, do perpetrators choose a civilian-targeted strategy and what makes it effective? Why is sexual violence so often a predominant form of attack? Policy actors need to understand more precisely who they are protecting and from what.

Several participants pointed to Libya—or the wholesale attack of a protesting public opposing the rule of an individual leader or core regime—as a departure from previous “models” of atrocity violence, such as Rwanda, that involved the scapegoat and eradication of a strategically isolated group. What do evolving manifestations, strategies, and incentives driving atrocity violence mean for developing approaches and tools?

Similarly, the international community has struggled to rationalize the relationship between mandates that fall within the broader “protection” agenda that encompasses R2P, civilian protection, protection of children in armed conflict, prevention of sexual violence in conflict, and so on. R2P discussion often occurs in isolation from related mandates, with overlapping policy needs and potential synergies left unexplored. In its next decade, R2P discussion should identify these links and more effectively maximize the policy impact of efforts related to each.

Refining the Tools

In tandem with deepening understanding of atrocity dynamics and policy needs, participants called for R2P's next decade to evaluate and refine the effectiveness of specific tools and to determine which are best suited to particular contexts and how they can best be applied. Discussion highlighted the following examples:

- **Preventive engagement of the International Criminal Court (ICC):** While widely touting its long-term deterrent impact through accountability, participants held varying views on ICC engagement in potential and ongoing crises, particularly through Security Council referrals. Some suggested a better understanding was required of how the threat of ICC prosecution shifts incentives and the internal dynamics of a given regime.
- **Balancing coercive and noncoercive means:** Participants noted that efforts at noncoercive engagement, such as in mediation in Kenya, have often involved targeted coercive elements. How have different mixtures of tools and approaches worked in the past, and what does this mean for future policy?
- **Protection through force:** While noting expanding doctrine to guide civilian protection in the context of peacekeeping, participants suggested that military and civilian decision makers are often ill-equipped to assess what protection mandates imply for military force in the rare

cases that require it, and what forms of military operations are best suited to protection objectives. Some key questions:

- Is protection by air, for example, an effective tool?
- Could the use of force be less invasive?
- Are ground troops the best means of ensuring protection while minimizing collateral damage?
- In what other ways does a protection mandate alter campaign design, strategy, and tactics?

Conclusion

R2P enters its second decade at a moment uniquely suited to practical reflection on lessons learned, remaining challenges, and future potential. Fully and frankly seizing this opportunity is the best way to honor the consensus that now roots R2P as a core element of international policy, as well as guarantee protection for populations under threat over the next decade and beyond.

Archive video of the full day’s discussion can be accessed at www.r2p10.org.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Memo do not necessarily reflect the view of the Stanley Foundation or any of the conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

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About The Stanley Foundation

The Stanley Foundation seeks a secure peace with freedom and justice, built on world citizenship and effective global governance. It brings fresh voices, original ideas, and lasting solutions to debates on global and regional problems. The foundation is a nonpartisan, private operating foundation, located in Muscatine, Iowa, that focuses on peace and security issues and advocates principled multilateralism. The foundation frequently collaborates with other organizations. It does not make grants. Online at www.stanleyfoundation.org.