

GREAT DECISIONS

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Historically, the international community and by default, the UN have been unable to prevent genocide. What lessons have been learned by places like Rwanda?

Well, one lesson I can say, is we keep saying “NA”. Each time we say “Never again,” the level of guilt rises and so we, I suppose, we exert more effort towards ensuring that “NE” becomes a reality.

And so the lesson learned is that we gave to be better organized, better equipped, better informed and be proactive in preventing more genocide, long before the situation escalates to the point of denial. And by denial, I don’t mean the only the perpetrators of genocide. Those who would be called upon to step in and stop it are reticent to recognize it for what it is. That is why prevention at an early stage is a much better option

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine has been gaining momentum at the UN. Do you really think it can prevent genocide?

You know R2P is based on three pillars, which I have to say on a personal note, are the pillars that guided me when I first introduced the idea of sovereignty as responsibility to guide me in the work I did for 12 years as Special Representative for the Secretary General on Internally Displaced People. Which by definition, is internal, and therefore falls under the sovereignty of the state – and the state is obviously very sensitive about protecting its sovereignty.

What I tried to do, building on work I have done at the Africa program at Brookings, is to see how the end of the Cold War affects the way we perceive conflicts.

We used to see conflicts as proxy wars, and depended on the superpowers either for resolving them or managing them or aggravating them. And with the withdrawal of the superpowers, we had to rethink how to approach these conflicts. See them in their proper contexts as regional and also as internal. And also learn that responsibility had to be apportioned or reapportioned; Instead of

depending on the superpowers the states have to assume their responsibility for managing their situations. And if they need help, to call on the international community to help.

And only in the extreme cases, where there is large suffering, massive amounts of suffering and death, which the countries are unable to stop, the world cannot sit and not get involved one way or the other.

But that principal, which was summarized in a book we called, “Sovereignty as Responsibility” guided me in my work on internal displacement. And the idea was, to tell governments, “I realize this is an internal matter, it falls under your sovereignty, and I’m respectful of your sovereignty.” But I don’t see sovereignty as a negative concept. I see it as a positive concept of state responsibility for its people. And if need be, with the help of the international community.

That is a concept that evolved through the Canadian sponsored commission on state sovereignty and Intervention, on to the high panel of the Secretary General on threats and challenges; on to the summit in 2005.

The R2p rests on these three pillars: the responsibility of state, support of state, and in extreme cases a more robust international involvement. It has come to be seen as largely a tool for intervention, which is why it is becoming controversial. If seen in its proper context, even if some people may claim that there is nothing totally new, and of course there is never anything totally new, including the notion of sovereignty as responsibility it’s a means of focusing our attention, pulling together, mobilizing people, and stimulating them to all act with a common purpose of stopping these atrocities and genocide.

The head of the General Assembly has spoken out against R2P, calling it imperialistic. How do advocates of R2P respond?

Well you know, Boutros-Ghali used to say, used to tell me when I was working with him on internal displacement that the fear of Third World Countries, by powerful countries of the North, is misplaced because quite often the problem is the reverse. It is the lack of interest, or reticence to get involved in situations where you may put your young people in harm’s way.

And therefore the fear, although grounded in historical experience, going back to imperialism and in colonialism and in other instances of intervention – the fear is largely an exaggeration of what may be the reverse and that is the lack of interest on the part of these countries to get involved.

What is happening, though, is that the last pillar of R2P is being taken as the one defining R2P. And what happened in this last debate, was that, not all, but most countries spoke favorably about R2P, but expressed concerns. What happened in the end is the president, of course, opened the panel before of the debate with his view of the situation, which was largely cautions and perhaps even negative; and ended the debate by highlighting the concerns and relegating the support to a secondary position. So we would have to see if, number one, whether the dust will settle and R2P in its proper perspective and in the long run, even if its not a totally new idea, it is a means of raising momentum, and of, as you said, galvanizing international action to stop what we feel must be stopped.

There was a rare success in Kenya, escalating violence that was curbed by international intervention. Could that prove to be a model?

Well, in a way it's a combination of a model that people can look to and perhaps emulate. It's a model where a former secretary-general who has tremendous influence still in the world is [fighting for it], where the current secretary of state, highly motivated also to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor in preventing these crimes; where the UN, the AU, virtually the whole international community, rallied around the efforts of African leaders, headed perhaps by Kofi Annan but by others. And this pulling together and intensely looking for options to that violence, worked. The questions, though, is: How often will the international community act with the same resolve and in concert to bring about change. And we see situations where, as I'm sure you have in mind, situations where the same action has not been mobilized.

There have also been other cases where an argument for intervention has been made. How can you and the UN play a role in preventing genocide in hot spots like Zimbabwe, Darfur and Congo?

Well you see, in the case of what happened in Kenya, people acted as the crisis manifested itself, they acted with a resolve to stop it.

If people wait, until such a point when people becoming more or less defensive, and in denial, where they claim these things are not happening, where they see international involvement as interference with their sovereignty, where to some extent there is not common ground, mutual desire to find solutions, it cannot work.

One of the reasons why prevention is important at an early stage is to appear to be working together with governments to help them do what it is in their own responsibility to do. So it's a question really of getting the resolve of the international community and the political will. This doesn't happen simply by reporting the facts of what is happening. It happens with mobilization, with stimulation, with motivating people to work with a common purpose. No government would like to see genocide, or mass atrocities, different kinds of crimes - happening in their country.

The question is, do we want to tap them early enough to engage constructively in ending what is evolving and escalating into genocidal levels.

What is the role of NGOs and multilateral bodies in peacekeeping?

My position as Special Advisor on the Prevention of genocide is that this is an impossible mandate that must be made possible. The only way to make it possible is for the mandate to be seen as a catalyst for a much greater level of involvement by all concerned - within the UN, outside the UN, involving governments, regional organizations, civil society, individuals as well as institutions.

People have different roles, for instance, even with my IDP work, when I engaged governments constructively to do what it is really their responsibility to do. One was able to gain entry into countries, access to people who are displaced, in a manner that was seen as constructive by government, perhaps seen by some as a soft approach, but once you go to a country and you see situations, you have to report, quite candidly. So if NGOs, humanitarian agencies and others are monitoring the situation and reporting, it is my responsibility to bring to the attention of the government, perhaps in a persuasive manner, "This is what is being said about what is happening in your country."

Even if they deny, denial itself means – we should not do it, we are not doing it and perhaps if we appear to be doing it, quietly we go back and do something about it to show the world that these allegations are not founded. That is constructive.

Civil society, and I use the term governments, are now in the post-Cold War era, playing a vital role. In fact, they are much more trusted by the international community sometimes than the governments. And therefore, it's in the interest of the governments to work with them, not as adversaries, but as potential allies in addressing the problems in their own countries.

Can development be seen as a national security issue?

First of all, what is the core of genocidal conflicts? I think they are conflicts or identities or identity related conflicts. The Genocide Convention talks about national groups, racial groups, religious groups and ethnic groups. It is not the mere differences raised on these groups that generate conflict. It's the discrimination, the marginalization, exclusion, denial of fundamental rights, denial of the rights of citizenship – an equitable distribution of power, of wealth, or services, of employment opportunities. So if that is the key, what you want to work for is equity, is justice. It is generating a distribution pattern that does not discriminate on the basis of these grounds.

Yes, development becomes a major factor because usually it is the marginalized, the deprived that sooner or later find a way of reacting against the injustice, perhaps even by rebellion. And that rebellion then generates an onslaught by

the more powerful governments against the so-called rebels and then you have a chain that can become genocide.

What are some non military conflict resolution and peace building efforts that should be put in place in Iraq and Afghanistan as we move forward?

Well you know, I cannot comment on specific situations because we have to know a lot more about what is going on to be able to tell. As a general rule, early intervention – by intervention, I don't mean unwelcome intervention or military intervention – I mean early involvement on a multilateral basis where all the capacities of the international system, working in concert with the UN and others, to address situations before they escalate to a level of violence that becomes very difficult to deal with. When things become violent and you are forced to use military force to address the situation, it inevitably becomes very messy.

That is why, even when I made my last mission to Darfur in 2004, and there was a lot of talk about potential intervention, I knew even then that military action could only complicate matter.

The option is not to say – military action or non-action – the option is to see how people can get involved early, exhaust peaceful means, as I said, make the government realize that it is their responsibility to their people, that their legitimacy, their place in the international community, respectability, decency requires that they live up to certain responsibilities. But if they need help, to call on the international community– to give help that would then be seen as a positive partnership, not intervention.

But when in the extreme situations, people are suffering and dying, it's also not an option to say "Involving ourselves military is too dangerous." There has to be a way of getting involved in a constructive way. First peacefully, exhaust all the peaceful means – but if need-be ultimately; a much more organized, effective collective, military action.

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