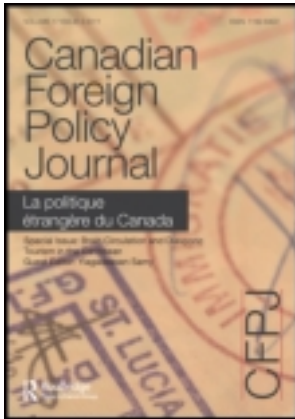


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Mobilizing the Will to Intervene: Leadership to Prevent Mass Atrocities

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Book Review

Mobilizing the Will to Intervene: Leadership to Prevent Mass Atrocities, by Frank Chalk, Roméo Dallaire, Kyle Matthews, Carla Barqueiro and Simon Doyle, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010, 191 pages, ISBN 978-0-7735-3803-0, C\$19.95

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Since its initial publication in 2001, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine has garnered plenty of interest, debate and controversy. Countless scholars, policy makers, diplomats and members of civil society have pondered whether there is, as the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty first argued, a moral responsibility for states and international institutions to intervene on behalf of those individuals worldwide being subjected to instances of atrocity and insecurity.

Building on previous arguments and discussions, *Mobilizing the Will to Intervene* seeks to make a novel contribution by offering four key areas that both the Canadian and United States governments should focus on in order to finally realize the R2P in their respective foreign policies, and to help foster the R2P norm more broadly. Derived from the Will to Intervene project (W2I) launched in 2007 by Concordia University's Montréal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, the authors set out to convince us that political will within developed democracies can, and must, be gained in order to prevent the outbreak of humanitarian crisis across the world. Political will, the lack of which is often said to be the primary obstacle to implementing the R2P, is the main focus of the book's content, and though the authors recognize the difficulty facing them in overcoming such daunting odds, they nobly present what they deem to be practical recommendations that can help prevail over an apparent lack of will within governments to date.

In order to build their case about the immaterial nature of political will, the authors divide the book into three sections. The first addresses the drivers of political and humanitarian violence in the world today, and how inaction is seen as more costly than action in the face of such horrendous crises. Political, financial and security costs are each presented as compelling arguments for why governments, especially those in the developed world, should be more willing to implement preventative strategies to protecting human populations. Following the presentation of the broad areas and costs of humanitarian violence, the book proposes two case studies as a means to demonstrate empirically the ways in which national governments, namely the American and Canadian governments, make decisions regarding humanitarian crisis. Rwanda and Kosovo are used to prove that political will, national interest and the influence of domestic populations are just some of the variables included in a state's foreign policy decision-making processes.

Ultimately, the book reaches its definitive purpose, which is to suggest what the authors claim to be practical recommendations as to how political will to prevent mass atrocities can be mobilized. These four courses of action for both Canada and the United States are summarized as demanding leadership from the executive and legislative branches of government on humanitarian issues; promoting and creating bodies to ensure interdepartmental coordination within both governments; using civilian and military capabilities to help build capacity on humanitarian issues through military training and funding; and lastly, using the media and the voices of civil society to pressure governments into action and ensure popular knowledge of mass atrocity.

While righteous in its intent, this book falls substantially short in providing any kind of practical solutions to a problem that extends far beyond an altered way of thinking for leaders in Canada and the United States. At the heart of the book's problem is its engagement with national security. Though it may be the case that instances of humanitarian crisis affect the national security calculations of neighbouring states in any given situation, there is hardly ample empirical evidence to effectively demonstrate that either Canada or the United States are directly threatened by such occurrences. The book often repeats the same line of questioning about why it is both the Canadian or American governments have yet to make any serious overtures toward operationalizing R2P (or any similar doctrine for that matter). The answer is fairly obvious, it would seem – because neither government accepts the underlying premise of this book, that we are able to equate the lives of those threatened by mass atrocity with our own. As a result, political will from within civil society or governments is unlikely to be fostered anytime soon.

The policy suggestions made in the book are certainly worthy of further examination and have the potential to raise awareness of human insecurity across the world, but even so, there is no clear line of argument presented here as to why the creation of new governmental bodies or committees, better funding, military training or media attention would change the prevailing attitudes about humanitarian crisis in any widespread sense. Cleverly, this book focuses almost exclusively on the prevention aspects of R2P and tries very hard in some ways to avoid engaging in the line of argument which presents R2P as an interventionist tool. Following in the steps of those like Alex Bellamy, the authors present the prevention model as the ideal means to operationalize R2P, and that these less costly steps when compared to 'boots on the ground' intervention will be more appealing to states. This is by far the more practical way to urge advanced democratic governments to take some kind of action toward addressing these vitally important issues and in this way, the book makes a valuable contribution.

In the final analysis, however, the book fails in its efforts to provide a pragmatic roadmap for the Canadian and American governments to begin implementing R2P in their respective domestic and foreign policies. Both countries are logistically weak after missions in Afghanistan and now Libya (and also Iraq in the American case), both have the advantage of geographical isolation from areas normally associated with humanitarian crisis, and neither has shown any genuine interest in making use of R2P.

In almost every way, the debate over R2P has become isolated to the ivory towers of universities and is quite detached from national security policy making. After the diluted version was passed by the United Nations (UN) in 2005, R2P became nothing more than a reaffirmation of existing international law. Since that time, many, including these authors, seem to lament the death of R2P and rightfully so. It is never easy to admit that states and institutions are willing to allow human populations to be slaughtered. Mass atrocity is by no means a new phenomenon, nor is it on the verge of disappearing from global politics anytime soon, especially with an emerging multipolar systemic structure that is likely to even further hinder the UN Security Council's ability to make fast and morally righteous decisions. Despite the powerful calls for change made in this book, states can be expected to remain their self-interested, rational and amoral selves both now and in the near future.