

The 'Responsibility to Protect' and the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

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Global Research Editor's note

The war in the Congo is upheld as a "civil war", when in fact the civil war is largely supported by foreign interests.

More than six million deaths with virtually no media coverage.

There is no "Responsibility to Report (R2R) the Truth of what is happening.



[1]

Threats of violence in the Congo have intensified in the runup to the presidential election. -
Photo: © P. Taggart, UNHCR

Now that Muammar Qaddafi of Libya is dead, proponents point to the successful deployment of the fast emerging doctrine, “The Responsibility to Protect” (R2P), as the means by which multilateral consensus led to a decision to intervene militarily and hand President Obama another foreign policy achievement.

Considered Kofi Annan’s greatest triumph during his 10-year tenure as U.N. secretary-general, R2P was unanimously endorsed in 2005 at the U.N. World Summit calling on the international community to use all “appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means ... to help protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.” The duty is both proactive, continuing and authorizes military force as a last resort where other means have failed.

Many have discussed how R2P was invoked to intervene in Libya, but not in similar situations in Bahrain and Syria. Still many remain skeptical of this doctrine. One ponders the obligation of the international community in a horrific situation like the Democratic Republic of the Congo where more than 6 million Congolese have died, half of them children, since 1996, with over 400,000 women raped as a weapon of war.

Some say that R2P was quickly approved for action in Libya because Qaddafi was publicly threatening to slaughter his opposition, and he had no friends in the West and few in the region. Others say that Libya represented the perfect marriage of Western, U.N. and Arab support joined with the pleas of the Libyan people.

NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen responded just prior to the passage of Security Council Resolution 1973 that only upon a showing of “demonstrable need, clear legal basis, and strong regional support” would NATO intervene. Others say it was used merely as a vehicle for regime change and are highly suspicious of R2P as a threat to national sovereignty and an excuse by wealthy nations to exert their will under color of law.

None of these reasons, however, explain the colossal failure on the part of the international community to stop the carnage in the Congo. Human Rights Watch said of the [2010 U.N. Mapping Exercise Report](#) [2] documenting the atrocities there that “this detailed and thorough report is a powerful reminder of the scale of the crimes committed in Congo and of the shocking absence of justice,” while “governments around the world remained silent when hundreds of thousands of unarmed civilians were being slaughtered in Congo.”

Now with presidential elections looming, tensions mounting and clarion calls for a consensus among the international community to act in defense of Congolese people, one considers the R2P doctrine and asks: Is it apathy or willed indifference that has caused the international community to fail time and again to act aggressively and effectively to address the greatest humanitarian crisis which faces the world today?

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There can be little dispute that the crisis in the Congo has gone beyond any R2P threshold. The cost of inaction is too high and indefensible. In its passage of [Public Law 109-456 in 2006](#) [3], the U.S. has acknowledged the national and international security interests at risk in the DR Congo. What can explain its five-year failure to implement its own law to affect some positive change to protect the people of the Congo?



[4]

Miners of the Congo's fabulous mineral wealth, often working with their bare hands, earn little more than an early death for themselves but vast fortunes for the plundering corporations and governments.

It is clear that as regards the Congo, we can have all manner of Universal Declarations of Human Rights, Geneva Conventions and International Criminal Courts, all of which make no difference without the political will - not military muscle - to enforce. Several things we know for sure:

The Congo will always remain fragile unless the state is strengthened so that it has the power to protect its own citizens and practice good governance.

The creation of a truly unified, effective and disciplined army subject to civilian rule is the only way to ensure the security of the people, excluding from the army and the police any individuals guilty of human rights abuses and including a working military tribunal capable of enforcing codes of conduct.

Peace can only be achieved through comprehensive regional diplomacy involving all stakeholders with appropriate pressure on Rwanda for the return of its refugees and political space to members of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) with all future aid tied to benchmarks of progress.

Those profiting from the looting of Congo's resources must be held to account for their actions, including those countries, individuals and corporations that participated in the pilfering of the Congo.

And who benefits from the instability of the Congo? The U.N. has documented the extensive exploitation of Congo's mineral wealth by Rwanda, Uganda, various rebel groups and private actors in its [2001 Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources](#) [5], its [2006 Resolution 1653](#) [6] and [2008 Final Report of the Group of Experts](#) [7]. Rwanda's strong economic hold in the region is tied to trade in illicit minerals out of the Congo.

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In 2009 discussions regarding the use of R2P, India Permanent Representative to the U.N. Hardeep Singh Puri said that "even a cursory examination of reasons for non-action by the U.N., especially the Security Council, reveals that in respect of these tragic events that were

witnessed by the entire world, non-action was not due to lack of warning, resources or the barrier of state sovereignty but because of strategic, political or economic considerations of those on whom the present international architecture had placed the onus to act.”



[8]

A sexual violence victim recovers in Goma, Congo. – Photo: Endre Vesvik

Sadly, this is the case of the Congo. Uneven distribution of resources and political repression, both in the Congo and the region, and the lack of political will to address these issues is at the heart of the crisis in the Congo. R2P recognizes that such root causes must be addressed for lasting solutions to take hold.

For as Ramesh Thakur, 2000 R2P commissioner, has stated: “In the real world, we know there will be more atrocities, victims and perpetrators — and interventions. They were common before R2P and are not guaranteed with R2P. The real choice is when, why, how and by whom. In the case of Libya, Thakur concluded, “the West’s strategic interests coincided with U.N. values.”

We cannot remain on the sidelines, complicit in war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide as this carnage in the Congo continues.

Given the hard choices presented by the myriad factors that comprise the situation in the Congo and competing bilateral interests, the international community has failed to speak with one clear, coherent voice. Whatever the ultimate solution, there is no question that we cannot remain on the sidelines, complicit in war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide as this carnage in the Congo continues.

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[2] 2010 U.N. Mapping Exercise Report:
<http://www.friendsofthecongo.org/resource-center/united-nations-report.html>

[3] Public Law 109-456 in 2006:
<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s109-2125>

[4] Image:
<http://sfbayview.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Congo-miners-hands.jpg>

[5] 2001 Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources:
<http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/drcongo.htm>

[6] 2006 Resolution 1653:
<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/226/45/PDF/N0622645.pdf?OpenElement>

[7] 2008 Final Report of the Group of Experts:
http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2008/773

[8] Image:
<http://sfbayview.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Sexual-violence-victim-recover-s-Goma-Congo-by-Endre-Vestvik.jpg>

[9] carrie@friendsofthecongo.org: <mailto:carrie@friendsofthecongo.org>

[10] Carnegie Mellon professors question university president over planned campus in Kagame's Rwanda:
<http://sfbayview.com/2011/carnegie-mellon-professors-question-university-president-over-planned-campus-in-kagames-rwanda/>

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[14] African Union threatens withdrawal from United Nations:
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