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Does R2P Matter?

Abstract

September 2015 marked the 10th anniversary of the endorsement of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) by the international community at the 2005 World Summit. This concept of humanitarian protection and intervention has been much heralded, much discussed and much criticised with what at best could be described as a mixed record of success. Since 2005 R2P has received much rhetorical recognition and associated ideational value in international discourse. As a human rights policy or doctrine of human security, it has been strongly promoted as a new international norm. However, in spite of the prominence with which R2P has been promoted and acclaimed we are still today, after more than 10 years, questioning, if not its value as an idea then certainly its effect as an international norm. This is particularly the case with the operation of its most controversial aspect: the responsibility of the international community to intervene in a state where it has failed and is unable to fulfil its core responsibility of protection of its people.

As we look out, at the beginning of 2016, on the ongoing humanitarian crisis within Syria one is left questioning whether this new understanding has had any meaningful impact in shaping the international community's behaviour towards mass atrocities being perpetrated.

The paper being presented argues that there are two phases of R2P's norm emergence that must be analysed to reach a full understanding of R2P's impact as a humanitarian intervention norm - first, the emergence of the norm and its embeddedness at the international level and second the internalisation of the norm at the state level. It is the degree to which the norm is internalised and impacts upon domestic foreign and security policy and decision-making within key states that properly determines whether R2P matters as an international norm. For the purposes of this part of the analysis the UK will be utilised as a case study.