

Research Project

The Perils of Saving Strangers: Darfur and the Politics of the Responsibility to Protect

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Project title The Perils of Saving Strangers: Darfur and the Politics of the Responsibility to Protect

Principal Investigator(s) [Goetschel, Laurent](#) ; [Péclard, Didier](#) ;

Project Members [Lanz, David Johannes](#) ;

Organisation / Research unit

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Politikwissenschaft (Goetschel)

swisspeace foundation / Peace Research (Goetschel)

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The proposed research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) – the belief that states have obligations to protect their citizens from mass atrocities, and if they are unwilling or unable, the international community should intervene to ensure protection, if necessary with military force. While there is ample research on the legal, political, and practical dilemmas of the R2P, and the related concept of humanitarian intervention, little is known about its effects on politics in conflict countries. In the absence of a full-fledged military intervention, the key to realizing the R2P is its ability to influence governments and insurgent groups. This leads to the following research question: How does the R2P affect the behaviour of domestic political actors in areas of conflict?

There is no clear-cut theoretical framework to answer this question and thus the purpose of the proposed study is exploratory: based on an inductive analysis, it aims to develop theoretical propositions on which future studies can elaborate. Nevertheless, the proposed study draws on existing research, in particular studies of norm diffusion in world politics. It thus conceptualizes the R2P as a norm – defined as collective expectations about proper behaviour in world politics. And it employs a generic framework, inspired from constructivist research on international human rights norms, to identify three processes through which the R2P norm produces effects in the real world: the mobilization of norm entrepreneurs; the response of states and international organizations; and the reaction of domestic groups.

The proposed study examines an unquantifiable phenomenon that constitutes a multi-causal path. It thus opts for a qualitative methodology in the form of the case study method – the intensive analysis of one case with the aim of making inferences about a larger set of cases. The population is given by cases of mass atrocities since 2001 when the R2P doctrine was formulated. The proposed research thus chooses the conflict in Darfur and distinguishes two case studies within the same unit of analysis. One analyzes the international response to the Darfur conflict from 2002 to 2004, when a vocal advocacy movement emerged, while the other case study focuses on the period from 2004 to 2009. Various data collection tools will be employed, including key informant and expert interviews as well as discourse analysis.

Keywords International norms, humanitarian intervention, responsibility to protect, peacebuilding, peace-making, Africa, Sudan, Darfur

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