# Revealing the Double Standards: A Critique of the Inconsistent Application of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) through Case Studies of Libya and Syria

By

Mateja Zherajikj

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of International Relations

*In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in International Relations*

Supervisor: Erzsebet Strausz

Vienna, Austria

2023

# Abstract

Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is an international norm that emerges to be simultaneously acclaimed and contested. After the failure to protect vulnerable populations in Srebrenica in 1995 and Rwanda in 1994, the international community was bound to converge and solidify their responsibility and desist from recurrence of such tragedies. Existing literature tackles political and legal limitations to R2P, along with the problematization of R2P, and what leads to its contestation, which this research reviews. However, this research's aim is to investigate the inconsistency of applying R2P by analyzing the geopolitical and strategic interests of states. Drawing on case studies from Libya and Syria, the analysis focuses on the inconsistency of R2P, as well as the fragility of the UN, when faced to react to mass atrocities and the protection of vulnerable populations. By delving into the international community's response and approach to the conflicts in Libya and Syria, the research identifies gaps, challenges, and selectiveness in the application of R2P. The analysis seeks to contribute to the contestation of state's reaction and interests, rather than a contestation of the norm.

# Acknowledgment

I want to thank Professor Erzsebet Strausz for her insightful and thought-provoking classes throughout my studies at CEU. Her unconditional support, insights, and feedback have always been valued and I will carry that with me throughout my career. Also, I would like to thank Professor Xymena Kurowska for her inspiring class International Intervention and State-building, which influenced this thesis topic. Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their support, love, encouragement, and empowering me throughout my academic journey.

# Table of Contents

# List of Abbreviations

**GNA –** Government of National Accord

**ICISS –** International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty

**LAAF –** Libyan Arab Armed Forces

**LAS –** League of Arab States

**R2P or RtP –** Responsibility to Protect

**UN –** United Nations

**UNSC –** United Nations Security Council

**UNSMIL –** United Nations Support Mission in Libya

# 1    Introduction

The discourse on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is evolving. It fuels a dynamic discourse that not only surpasses praiseworthy characteristics of the norm but embraces a comprehensive critical perspective, and this dichotomy is essential to understanding R2P. As a precursor to the League of Nations, the United Nations (UN) was founded officially after World War II to uphold peace and security worldwide (National Archives and Records Administration 2022). Conflicts, genocides, atrocities, and wars of all kinds are inevitable. This is where the integrity and responsibility of states come into question. The international community has been faced with mass atrocities but lacked to react and protect vulnerable populations in cases such as in the Rwandan Genocide, the Srebrenica Genocide, the Myanmar Rohingya Crisis, and the Syrian Civil War. Thus, sparking debates regarding the protection of civilians when their own state fails to protect. R2P aims to serve as a collective responsibility to protect populations that are faced with "genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity" (Simonovic 2016). Additionally, the challenges that come with R2P, although the norm is well-intended, need to be crucially addressed to boost R2P and its application to effectively protect vulnerable population, but also successfully aid and support rebuild states after mass atrocities. The Security Council, regardless of whether they aimed to react to conflicts, mass atrocities, etc., has been under scrutiny (Foot 2011, 49).

This research aims to explore not merely the complexity of the international norm but also how state interests can influence the consistency of R2P. Therefore, the research question is how do geopolitical and strategic interests of powerful states impact the application of the R2P norm? Through discourse analysis, this research will analyze various scholar's arguments that either scrutinize the international community's reaction to mass atrocities or that support R2P. Furthermore, the contribution in this research is to explore the geopolitical and strategic interests of states to divulge the complexity of applying R2P. The inconsistency of applying

the norm is what inspired this research. There is extensive literature on R2P's failure or successes, but the decision to fixate on, and research the state interests through the case studies of Libya and Syria seek to expand on the current debates regarding the inconsistent application of R2P. The cases of Libya and Syria were chosen due to the reaction and differing approaches that the international community undertook to mitigate the political, economic, and social situation, and the attempt to end the violence in those two countries.

The second chapter will include the literature review, which entails key principles of R2P, norm contestation, the methodology along with the research question. This chapter gives an introductory position in order to provide a foundational context to the international norm before delving into the contestation of the norm and the complexity of applying R2P. Subsequent to this chapter, the political and legal limitations to R2P are essential because it specifies the constraints to R2P, and how it can be viewed as one of the reasons for its contestation. Furthermore, in chapter 3 state sovereignty is explored due to its unsteady relationship with R2P. The encroachment of state sovereignty is under question when applying R2P, due to the fear of some states, which will be named later in the chapters. Those fears include how R2P may be used for ulterior motives and advancing state's interests, rather than the prime and fundamental protection of vulnerable populations. As a result, normative resistance will be studied briefly to understand the dissatisfaction, and criticism of R2P by states. Having expounded on the criticism and contestation of R2P, chapter 4 will investigate the two empirical cases of Libya and Syria to understand how geopolitical and strategic interests can negatively impact the harmony of the international community in terms of applying R2P collectively.

# 2   Literature Review

## 2.1   Key Principles of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

After the international community failed to prevent and protect vulnerable populations in Srebrenica and Rwanda, it generated widespread debates regarding the responsibility to protect and prevent the threat of mass atrocities. Former Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), Kofi Annan, contributed and encouraged the discourse of R2P (United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect). As a result, "the challenge was taken by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), set up by the Canadian Government, which at the end of 2001 issued a report entitled The Responsibility to Protect" (ibid.). R2P consists of three pillars,

> 1) "Every state has the Responsibility to Protect its populations from four mass atrocities crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, 2) The wider international community has the responsibility to encourage and assist individual states in meeting that responsibility, 3) If a state is a manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action, in a timely and decisive manner and in accordance with the UN Charter" (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2022).

It is noteworthy to highlight that Alex J. Bellamy, a scholar and director of the Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to protect, emphasizes that "when governments, regional organizations and the UN talk about R2P they mean not the concept put forwards by the ICISS, but the principle endorsed by the world leaders at the 2005 World Summit and reaffirmed by the Security Council in 2006" (Bellamy 2008, 622). Bellamy and Davies (2009) emphasize that the first pillar serves as foundation for states to fortify their sovereignty when implementing R2P (550). The second pillar is meant to support states to commit to R2P, and the third pillar refers to the responsibility of the international community to react to mass atrocities, through the UN, when national authorities are failing to (ibid.). To better understand R2P as a norm, Bellamy and Davies (2009) frame it as a "political commitment to implement

already existing legal obligations in a manner consistent with international law" (568). However, Foreign Minister of Malaysia Syed Hamid emphasized the questions and challenges that arise with R2P, such as its "legal, moral, operational and political" inferences (ibid., 563), which are valid and contested properties to R2P. The legal basis of R2P traces back to the Genocide Convention that fundamentally obliges states to not only prevent but to also punish genocide (Kunadt 2011).

R2P can be found in "human rights covenants, especially the Genocide Convention, international humanitarian law and the UN Charter and are engrained in basic values of developing international community" (ibid.). Kundt (2011) further acknowledges and identifies that R2P serves as a practical implementation rather than a customary international law, and how it lacks a concise definition, thus creating a deviation from other norms, and how it cannot be determined as an exceptional and secluded norm, but with the help of other norms under international law (ibid.). However, R2P outside the UN Charter is considered not part of international law (ibid.). These points all contribute to the contestation of R2P, and how vague and obstruse the discourse of R2P is, but also justifies the limitations that are present to not threaten state sovereignty and stability and avoid exploitation by powerful state to fit state interests. The author importantly argues that,

> …the idea of sovereignty as responsibility is fit into a broader concept and transposed to the international plane, potentially having a catalytic impact on its implementation. Constituting a holistic concept, the RtP puts emphasis on the preventive rather than the reactive answer to conflicts, a component lately neglected within the UN system. (ibid.)

R2P is impactful and powerful without its legal basis, which is simultaneously contested; however, this creates larger problems in relation to preventing mass atrocities.

Former Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon in 2009 promoted the advancing of the implementation of the R2P doctrine by releasing the report "Implementing the Responsibility to Protect", which shortly was encouraging the accord on the doctrine (ibid.). Interestingly enough, to demonstrate the dialogues early on in the rise of the norm, or even the disagreements over the discourse of R2P and the varied perceptions of states, during the debate in the Assembly, after Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon promoted the advancement of the implementation of the norm, some states argued that there is no need for this implementation of R2P because it already exists in the international mechanisms (ibid.). Meanwhile other states argued that it is only a political and moral call, but not necessarily a responsibility, and was even labeled "an ally of sovereignty" in order to create a well-disposed and less foreign terminology (ibid.). Furthermore, during the debate in the Assembly, states indicated and signified the ambiguity of the definition of R2P, such as concern over the prompting of the norm, the role of the Security Council, as well as the affiliation with other organs of the UN and the lack of solutions (ibid.).

Essential arguments and points that can be taken from the debate, is, for instance, "the use of force is not envisaged in the application of the human security concept" (ibid.). Now, the use of force is not part of the human security concept, however, if the application of R2P is found to be inadequate, only then, as a last resort, will the international community spark debates regarding force, and eventually come to the decision, but only in accordance with international law and the approval of the UN. Although scholars and experts argue about the vagueness of the norm, it is important to mention that the act of force has changed the discourse of R2P and humanitarian war (Pommier 2011, 1066). What would permit the international community to proceed with force is the following, "responsibility for the use of force should be guided by strict criteria: seriousness of the harm done to the population; a just cause for intervention; intervention as a last resort; proportionality of the means used and an assessment

of its consequences" (ibid.). Scholars, such as Kunadt (2011), have strong statements such as stating that "no military intervention has been explicitly based on the R2P since the World Summit" (ibid.). To contrast that strong statement, according to *the Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*, R2P has shown to be operative, or just invoked in over 80 UN Security Council resolutions to deal with crises in Libya, which this research will center around, and then also Yemen, South Sudan, Congo, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, etc.

The discourse of R2P incorporates the implementation, its limitations, the diverging understandings of the norm, conflicting arguments, norm contestation, calls for refining the meaning. Many policymakers and scholars who engage in the debates can be seen as a contribution towards a more consistent and reliable norm, simply by challenging the norm. States have diverging opinions, approaches, and perceptions to R2P, however, the overall substance of this research is to delve into the limitations and interests that dominate and overpower the purpose of this norm. Additionally, this research will interact with the selective nature of responses from different states and understand what the underpinnings are to these negative aspects and intricacies of R2P.

## 2.2   Norm Contestation and Application of R2P

Before delving into the theme of norm contestation more extensively, it is vital to firstly explore what a norm is in the context of international relations, and specifically the emergence of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Furthermore, the process of questioning norms and values within the international community, and the effects it has on the application and response to mass atrocities is what primarily inspired this research. In essence, this is can be attributed to the legal and political constraints, states interests, and consequently how it negatively impacts norm robustness, which will be further researched and analyzed in the following chapters.

Definitions of norms vary in substance depending on whether the norm is perceived from a sociological, political, or cultural standpoint, although similar, there are distinguishable definitions to what a norm is, and especially in the context of IR. According to the social constructivist politician scientist Alexander Wendt, "a norm is an accepted standard of behavior among a group of actors" (quoted in Williams, 2012). Moreover, norms serve as a shared guide and collective decision-making by state actors (Williams, 2012). Another definition of a norm by Homans (1961), who was a renowned sociologist in the field, is "A norm is a statement made by a number of members of a group, not necessarily by all of them, that the members ought to behave in a certain way in certain circumstances," (quoted in Gibbs 1965, 586) and lastly as per Johnson (1960), "A norm is an abstract pattern, held in the mind, that sets certain limits for behavior. An 'operative' norm is…considered worthy of following in actual behavior; thus one feels that one ought to conform to it" (quoted in Gibbs 1965, 586). The rationale for my selection of these definitions, is the key words that one confronts when exploring definitions of norms, which provides a parameter of how ambiguous norms are. The key words, phrases, and sentences that we encounter are "abstract," "limits," "members of a group, not all of them," "collective," "conformity," which is only a fraction of the characterizations that one can encounter when endeavoring to research and potentially challenge norms. These all offer an interesting insight into the study of norms, specifically R2P in this case.

Many scholars, (Wiener 2020; Deitelhoff and Zimermann 2018; Rhoads and Welsh 2019), have discerned the trend in norm contestation and have recognized that norms need to be understood well in order to understand their pattern of change and why they get contested. Now, that norms have been previously explained above, contestation on the other hand, according to Wiener (2020),

… is defined as a practice that can either indicate objection to something, for example the implementation of a norm as 'contested compliance' or breaches of a norm as 'contested norm violation' (1).

Contrary to some arguments about contestation, contestation could either benefit or disadvantage a norm, but that leads to the question as to when do norms become contested Deitelhoff and Zimermann, 2018, 52)? Similarly, to the emergence of this research, norm contestations provoke justifications and debates, but firstly the validity of a norm arises from the shared acceptance in a community which leads to a shared obligation by their discourses and become actively visible only when they are violated (ibid., 53). As previously mentioned, norms are complex. According to Rhoads and Welsh (2019),

> … norms are both stable and flexible often makes it difficult to reach agreement on their content and to identify the particular behaviors that their underlying values demand. This difficulty is particularly acute for R2P and PoC, which, as relatively recent and "emerging norms," have experienced significant discursive and behavioral contestation (601).

Contestation arises with R2P, as per the argument of Rhoads and Welsh (2019,) due to the intricacies that arise with the legality and the status of the norm and argue that it is more inclined to contestation because it is not legally binding, thus creating a complex and limiting application (ibid.). Due to its unstipulated nature, and the complexity of measuring its effect and power, depending on what form of intervention occurs, Welsh (2013) suggests that R2P should be viewed as a "responsibility to consider a real or imminent crisis involving mass atrocity crimes" (Welsh, 2013, Abstract). It is worth mentioning that norm building does induce prosperous cases, nevertheless, some of the international community members do dispute the effectiveness, and legitimacy of applying R2P (Badescu and Weiss, 2010, 355). This is another instance of the reasoning behind contestation that could occur because of misuse and misrepresentation of the purpose of the norm (ibid.).

Many scholars investigate the norm by questioning its feasibility and practicability as a norm. For instance, Reinold (2010) adversely argues regarding the implications for the use

of the norm, and although there is a strong verbal acceptance among the international community, there is still questions regarding the meaning of R2P and the "concept's implications for the use of force" (56). Reinold (2010) points out that the lack of understanding and mutual consensus of what the concept of R2P is what will lead to the lack of responsiveness, and selective application of the norm (57).

Interpretations in regard to what R2P means for the international community is argued by Hofmann & Zimmermann (2019) as either unifying, resilient, and a strong norm, and are argued by other scholars for being selective, and blindsided following the intervention in Libya and the crisis in Syria, while some scholars condemn the norm for being divisive, and view it as a "policy idea with norm potential" (138). Furthermore, what is missing currently in the institutionalization of the norm is a "a). conceptual clarity, and thus an intersubjective consensus on the implications of R2P (regarding the military aspect), and b). consistent application of R2P in state practice" (Reinold 2010, 74). Reinold (2010) further elaborates that from an IR perspective, R2P is not necessarily a norm, but a standardized conduct that ought to be accepted and put into practice by the international community (ibid.). Lastly, as previously explored in previous sections, from an international law perspective, the norm is less reassuring due to the ambiguity that arises from the obligations and jurisdiction that the states have to intervene, since it does not meet the elements and characteristics under the international law (ibid.).

All previously analyzed and discussed explanations or notions regarding the contestation of R2P provide a basis for my research in order to properly explore and discover the process that the international community goes through in implementing R2P. Additionally, how the implementation plays out, especially with concurring views and perspectives of the international community. Chapter 4 will contribute to the already existing dialogues and

controversies about the discourse of R2P, but also attempts to look at the cases of Libya and Syria by looking into the application of R2P in Libya and Syria and how state interests coincide with protecting mass atrocities.

## 2.3    Methodology, Research Question and Statement

This research will use discourse analysis. Discourse analysis allows to interpret and understand the way narratives and power dynamics operate in R2P discourse, and essentially assists in filling in or even connecting the gap between "real language phenomena and the workings of power in society" (Manzoor & Saeed & Panhwar 2019, 301). According to Mazoor & Saeed & Panhwar (2019), analyzing the use of language leads to the interpretation and realization of roles and power in different parts of our societies, those being politics, reporting, media, etc. (ibid.). It will provide a clearer understanding of how norms are constructed, studying power relations and dynamics, also looking into different state and non-state actors' interests, and exploring the influence of contestation. Discourse analysis will provide an "in-depth analysis and close understanding of various social phenomena reflected by the language or symbols" (ibid., 302).

As previously stated, my research will center on the inconsistencies of R2P by looking into norm contestation, but I am limiting my scope of study by focusing on two specific case studies: Libya and Syria. The empirical case studies of Libya and Syria, which are an integral part of the research, will provide a narrowed down and in-depth analysis of geopolitical and strategic interests of the international community, specific focus on UNSC member states, but not limited to. My research question is how do geopolitical and strategic interests of powerful states impact the application of the R2P norm?

Conducting discourse analysis to explore norm contestation, constraints of R2P, and the empirical case studies will provide a foundational and conceptual explanation to the research assumption, however, some limitations will be present. I will look into a variety of

sources, such as UN reports, speeches, resolutions, along with secondary sources such as media reports, and academic literature. Although there are documents, government statements, media coverage on various cases relating to R2P, many key information and primary sources are either challenging to obtain or confidential thus making this form of analysis limited. Furthermore, this research will attempt to refrain from biasness in the assumptions that R2P is selective in its applications, simply because discourse analysis involves analyzing language, perceptions, and attitudes towards a given problem, therefore creating space for subjectivity and partiality. Additionally, this method of choice focuses primarily on language use and how that language forms and outlines interpretations and behaviors, which could possibly exclude information into the definite and concrete understanding of R2P's selectivity, if that is the case.

In conclusion, the literature has shown the key principles of R2P, as well as its constraints, those being legal and political. R2P has been extensively studies, however, the case studies of Libya and Syria will attempt to fill in the gap in the literature by incorporating the narrowed down discourse analysis by focusing on geopolitical and strategic interests of states.

# 3 Exploring the Thorny Path of Political and Legal Constraints to R2P

The upcoming chapter will discuss the political and legal constraints to R2P. This chapter is significant because it is necessary to recognize the limits to the norm in order to better understand how it can become a rhetoric for some countries to either reject resolutions or applying R2P to end mass atrocities. Furthermore, this chapter will provide a fundamental argumentation and problematization surrounding the limits of the norm that will serve as the base for the succeeding sections and last chapter on the two case studies of this thesis.

## 3.1 Political and Legal Limitations

As a result of mass atrocities such as Rwanda and Srebrenica, as well as the self-directed decision of the NATO to intervene in Kosovo, non-interference was no longer the credible option after many decades of non-interference principle among states globally (Australian Red Cross 2011, 5). R2P originates from the "…Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and, of course from IHL" (ibid.). It is vital to note that R2P as an international norm has never been formally codified as a human rights law (Bellamy 2012, 3). The legal limitations of R2P are seen as one of many leading factors to the contestation of the norm. Bellamy argued that R2P was seen as a contested norm, up until applying the norm in Libya (ibid., 7). Although, putting it into practice, which I will discuss in Chapter 4 with the case of Libya and Syria, has shown that it is disputed by some states, experts, and scholars that study R2P. Which consequently leads to the lack of consensus among states, because of the nebulousness of the international norm and its intentions once applied. Bellamy (2012) challenges the argument that the issue with the contestation of R2P is not as simplistic as stating its irrelevance or inapplicability, but "the missing international consensus around how this principle should be executed when confronted with cases such as Libya and Syria" (ibid.). A different approach to understanding the normative status and properties of R2P, Brosig (2012) argues that the vagueness of R2P could be viewed as an advantageous quality (120). Brosig

(2012) suggests that the essence of the norm, being that it is not fixed and rigid, allows space for fitting each individual case as needed, "norms diffuse precisely because - rather than despite the fact that - they may encompass different meanings, fit in with a variety of contexts, and be subject to framing by diverse actors" (ibid.). The argument favors norms such as R2P, simply because fixed norms have shown to be contested because of the inability to properly fit each case, and consequently creates little political debate, cooperation, and policy amends that align with each specific crisis. Crucially, one should not dismiss that due to the nature of a norm, that is clearly not a legal norm, can easily be misrepresented and exploited to benefit a state's national interests (ibid., 121).

Conflicting discourses and practices, according to Wolf (2012), are argued to be because of its obstruse language (111). On the contrary, Gareth Evans (2008) argues that the change of the language regarding R2P was necessary because the rhetoric was aiming to step away from "the right to intervene," which showed to be ineffective (294). In order to tackle political limitations and conflicting outlooks of the norm that causes lack of accord, Wolf (2012) suggests that there is this "link between the state-centric and often Western-dominated interpretation of R2P and a localized and regionalized understanding that is missing in today's discourse" (112). This gap causes contestations of R2P, especially because the lack of regionalized and localized understandings of R2P. Additionally, the fixation of powerful state's interests deviates away from putting R2P in favor of helping state's citizens when conflicts arise. Contrary to initial understanding of R2P, state could have a fixed understanding of R2P, and still promote against the application of R2P for various reasons, such as state's interest, non-interference beliefs, and protection of sovereignty. However, scholars like Wolf debate the limited outlook on R2P and the way it shapes the discourse of R2P, especially in the absence of localized involvement and understandings. Which is similar to the argument of Kühn (2021), who argued that Western intervention should focus less on copy-pasting their own society, economy, and politics, but

center more on altering these institutions to local social conditions and norms, and political practice.

### 3.2 Power Play: The Complex Relationship between State Sovereignty and R2P

Sovereignty is "the institutionalization of public authority within mutually exclusive jurisdictional domains" (Ruggie 1986, 143). When discussing the implementation of R2P, a reoccurring concept is state sovereignty and the impending divergence it has with R2P. Therefore, many states express apprehension when R2P is to be evoked. As per Thakur (2002), "the responsibility for protecting the lives and promoting the welfare of citizens lies first and foremost with the sovereign state" (324). However, when there is the presence of what the author calls "a responsibility deficit" (ibid.), which is fundamentally the state's inability to prevent violence and protect its own citizens, is when the agreed upon norm by the international community should come into force (ibid.). To battle against issues such as protecting civilians of a state that has shown inadequate efforts to protect, is not presenting any novel attributes to world politics. Nevertheless, Thakur (2002) suggests that circumventing the UN in order to conduct a war, regardless of its severity and justification, is challenging and sets an idealistic view to the "normative architecture of world order" (ibid.). Ultimately, this traces back to the case of Kosovo, where NATO, without the approval of the UN, intervened to prevent the massacre in Kosovo, which was committed by Milosevic and others, however, this is before the first implementation of R2P which was in Libya in 2011. This shows the overall evolution of the norm and how the international community grappled with acts of mass atrocities.

To understand the concept and evolution of state sovereignty, it is imperative to mention the formation of sovereign states that is attributed to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, and the opposing system that began post-World War II and has sustained onwards as a result of the development of an international body of laws and practices, which has led to the limitation of state's sovereignties (Mazzanti 2013, 12). This evolution has created a change in the discourse

14

of the concept of sovereignty, how norms can come into effect, and challenges state sovereignty (Roth 2011, 4). Fundamentally, R2P, is argued by Thakur (2002), as an attempt to foster a connection between the international community and the sovereign state (328). Furthermore, there is a difference between domestic and international legal constraints, to which the author argues "internationally, states are constrained by globally legitimated institutions and practices" (ibid., 329). Thakur (2002) argues that these "legitimated institutions and practices" (ibid.) are necessary for the welfare of people, and the application of R2P is not to infringe on sovereignty, but more so to hold states accountable when they fail to do so themselves (ibid.).

Tracing back to the core of this research, which is the selective nature of R2P, some scholars are sympathetic towards the vagueness of R2P, and the affects it has on decision making. In addition, acknowledging the intricacy of the selectiveness "In the Security Council, R2P becomes a selective concept, and sovereignty is unconditional for some and conditional for others, based on a state's power to resist intervention and their clout in the international system" (Auf, 2023). Although a laden statement, states have their own interpretations of what sovereignty is, and how central it is to protect their state's interests, thus creating space for countries such as India, Russia, Brazil, and China to disagree with UN resolutions that aim at intervention, even if it is concerning the welfare of people, and preventing mass atrocities.

### 3.3 Normative Resistance

When examining the evolution of R2P, and specifically how it was perceived in the international arena, one gains insight that the international norm was continuously subjected to scrutinization and criticism by scholars and states. As per Bellamy (2013), the way one can view the criticisms of R2P is by dividing it into two lines of criticism, 1). After 2001, which marks the rise of R2P as an endorsed principle by the UNSC, many states and scholars argued that the norm is an attempt at western interventionism and neo-imperialism (p. 334). For instance, Mahmood Mamdani, a scholar of colonialism and post-colonialism, called R2P "a slogan that masks the big

power agenda to recolonize Africa" (ibid.). This criticism was revived during the Libyan Crisis in 2011, where the states regime was intended to be changed for the welfare of the affected population, to which the author argues is a validation of the fear that scholars such as Mamdani expressed (ibid.). 2). The second conspicuous criticism was around the debates that R2P cannot change the behavior of the state (ibid.). To which Bellamy brought in scholars such as Aiden Hehir and Michael Wesley who held that states react only when it is advantageous and beneficial to the state's interest (ibid.). These two criticisms are a portion of the magnitude of normative resistance, because as previously discussed the complexity of R2P lies in many aspects, such as state sovereignty, state interest, western-led interventionism, and taking attention away from state's own infringements of human rights. China, Russia, India, and the US are all powerful countries that do put their self-interest in the forefront or concerns over the possible spill-over effect, affecting their decision-making in the process of responding to mass atrocities.

In the post-Libyan era, R2P's reputation was not saved, since many states reservations became true, that being what Bloomfield (2016) suggests as "…outcomes following Western-led interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya – with the view that these societies had become more unstable and precarious" (395). Although controversial, those reservations were of states like China and India, which Bloomfield (2016) categorized "China as a Creative Resister, India Remains a Norm Begrudger" (ibid., 394). The role of China and India during the Libyan Crisis was there but distant and as challengers. What is meant by distant is that they did not support a military intervention, or the no-fly zone Resolution. Instead, what India supported, for instance, is the imposing of economic sanctions and no foreign military intervention (ibid., 395). Whereas China, on the other hand, refrained from most UN resolutions due to the inconsistencies of the debate among the UNSC and the regional organizations, such as the African Union (AU) (ibid., 395). Although, the author sees China's and India's positionality as a practice of stimulating the international order by demonstrating normative resistance, it is important to note that this

contributes to the general debate as to the factors behind the contestation of the norm, and how difficult it is to pinpoint the inconsistent applications.

To better grasp norm resistance, Auger (2011) suggests that states are indirect about their objection to the norm, because "no state wishes to be portrayed as unconcerned with mass-atrocity crimes" (90). This portrays a complex calculated approach to which many states, as previously mentioned like China and India, would shape a certain rhetoric so it would seem as if they were supportive of preventing and condemning mass atrocities, but choose to side with narratives such as "protection of state sovereignty" and calling the involvement of other states as "an infringement of state sovereignty." State sovereignty is an important factor which this debate returns to. Altogether, these powerful states have had dissimilar approaches to reacting to mass atrocities, which includes putting political and state interests forward. Looking beyond the state interest is necessary to consider how multifaceted the approach and reaction to the international norm is. An obvious norm resistant example, according to Auger (2011), would be the challenging of the legitimacy of the norm, which has been emphasized by China (ibid), however, a notable mention would be the perseverance of trialed procedures in the UN that have shown to be ineffective (ibid., 91). Similarly, to what Wolf (2012) argued, Auger (2011) argues that there is a conflicting language usage but differs in the idea that there should be the expansion of the meaning and application of R2P, such as for climate or natural disasters (92). Furthermore, what Auger (2011) acknowledges is the superiority that powerful states hold, specifically the US, when looking into the reaction of mass atrocities (93). In the P-5, there is China and Russia, who have friendly relations and, more or less, the same countering reactions to the application of R2P, especially in the case of Syria. Then we have the US, which has a particularly superior leverage over other countries, who cooperates closely with the UK, for instance the war in Iraq, and Libya. Additionally, then there is France which was involved in the military intervention in Libya but had a more diplomatic rather than a military involvement in Syria. Nevertheless, the subsequent

chapter will study the cases of Libya and Syria, with the aim to disclose the inconsistencies of

R2P by analyzing the geopolitical and strategic interests of states.

# 4   Exploring Geopolitical and Strategic Interests in the Context of Libya and Syria

The following chapter will analyze the geopolitical and strategic interests of states that influence the inconsistent application of R2P. Firstly, I will briefly mention the conflict background of Libya and Syria, to give a foundational understanding of the conflicts. Next, the complex interplay of geopolitical dynamics is examined, which shed a light on a few of many factors that are contributory to the varying application of R2P. And lastly, each case study will research the strategic interests and objectives of state actors. To conduct my analysis, I will look into a range of sources, such as UN reports, official statements/speeches, resolutions, along with secondary sources such as media reports, and academic literature. However, the method that will be used to conduct this analysis is discourse analysis, in order to look at the nuanced and wide-ranging analysis of the inconsistent application of R2P and provide an analysis that will encourage the ongoing debate regarding the complexity of R2P. My contribution stems in studying the geopolitical and strategic interests of the international community in relation to the inconsistent application of R2P by discovering the variety of objectives. The decision to conduct the research in this way is because:

A. It allows for a deeper and more narrowed down analysis and understanding of the objectives and power dynamics that sway the decision-making process of applying R2P to prevent mass atrocities.

B. Looking into the factors that contribute to the varying application and response of the international community by choosing two distinctive cases with dissimilar reactions from relevant state actors.

C. Studying Libya and Syria, by including the two key interests, gives an insight into the dynamics involved in these conflicts. By fixating on the interests of powerful states and global players, it will help understand why certain interventions or

reactions form the international community are practiced while others are overlooked.

## 4.1 The Case of Libya

### *4.1.1  Conflict Background*

An empirical case study on Libya will provide a valuable insight into why R2P is contested. But also permits to unravel the inconsistency of applying R2P when atrocities occur. Additionally, the case of Libya will stage the problematization of the international norm. On the contrary, considering how the events in Libya transpired, relating specifically to the application of R2P and the reaction of the international community, it shows how it can transpire as a selective practice, not with this case but with the international community's reaction to Syria, for instance. Through the analysis of interests, specifically geopolitical and strategic interests, it aims to contribute to the discourse of discrepancy in the application of R2P by the international community, therefore this analysis aims to elucidate the factors that can result in the selective practice of R2P. Geopolitical interests, and strategic interests will dissect the density and problems that arise with the varying applications of the norm. In this research, when looking at geopolitical interests that includes security and power, which is influenced by factors such as resources, geography, and alliances. While strategic interests, on the other hand, will look into the objectives and motives that states seek to accomplish via its foreign policy, which may include the protection of its resources, boosting its economy, national security, and spreading influence in the international system.

According to *the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*, the Muammar Qaddafi led government responded to the popular 2011 uprising with violence (Libya - Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect 2023). The Libyan government, responded by killing approximately 700 civilians in a matter of weeks after the start of the uprising (ibid.). The UNSC adopted resolutions 1970 and 1973 to react to these mass atrocities committed by

Qaddafi's government (ibid.). The Qaddafi government was overthrown, however, the UN led peace operations failed to reinstate stability in the country, which led to armed militias committing further atrocities to its people (ibid.). For instance, the failure to stabilize the country led to the attempt to gain back the territory by the Libya Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) from the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, which led to further mass atrocities and human rights violations (ibid.). Furthermore, more recently the UNSMIL was reinstated and aimed for political dialogue and stability until the next elections in the end of 2021 (ibid.).

The responsibility to protect was put, for the first time, in practice with the case of the Libyan humanitarian crisis. To reiterate, R2P contains two fundamental positions, a). responsibility of the states for their own population (internal responsibility), and b). international community intervening in host state to protect vulnerable populations when the host states fail to do so (external responsibility) (Hehir 2013, 147). Thakur (2011) argues that when discussing sovereignty and nonintervention, R2P gives a sufficient balance between "unauthorized unilateral interventions and institutionalized indifference" (13). This notion is vital due to the controversy regarding the response to the humanitarian crisis in Libya, and the ongoing controversies surrounding the right to war. What changed was the practice of defending internally to defending and protecting externally, outside of a state's border, thus reiterating the two fundamental positions of R2P.

As discussed previously in Chapter 3, sovereignty is challenged when discussing intervention and applying R2P. What was "achieved" specifically after the failed responses in Rwanda, Kosovo, and East Timur is the "reconceptualizing sovereignty as a responsibility" (Thakur 2011, 15). The shift in discourse from "sovereignty to responsibility" modified the current discourse of sovereignty and intervention, which appears to be an issue for some states when it comes to reacting to mass atrocities. However, it is important to mention that this

deviation from the common practice and understanding of sovereignty did not drastically restructure the act and practice of intervention, but rather readjusted it to fit the modern international system and protect civilians domestically and internationally (ibid). In the following section, I will delve into the geopolitical interests of global actors, and powerful states that contribute to the varying applications of R2P.

### 4.1.2 Geopolitical Interests

To conceptualize the motives behind the inconsistent application of R2P, it is necessary to investigate the geopolitical interests of states in the process of decision-making of applying R2P when atrocities occur. The lack of consensus among the key players of the UNSC is indicative of the possible lack of consistent application of R2P, and simply the act of diverging and departing from the core purpose of R2P, which is the protection of vulnerable populations (Tarnagorski 2012, 4). And as Tarnagorski (2012) argues, the actions taken by the UN with Libya were contested primarily due to the regime change (ibid.).

Geopolitical interests can constraint the application of R2P and how the international community reacts. The response to the conflict was suggestive of the geopolitical interest for states in the region and outside of it, because of access to oil resources, political alliances, and regional instability. The discourse around R2P, specifically how it was applied in Libya, is that there are interests that overshadow the core values of the norm. Those being of oil, to which even recently the US Ambassador in Libya, Richard Norland, mentioned that there is a risk that rival groups could potentially aim at obtaining control of certain territories in Libya in order to gain full control of the oil income (TRT World 2022). Libya as a substantial oil and natural gas producer, countries in Europe and North America pursue its reserves. Thus, affecting the consensus of the P5 decision to implement R2P in Libya, because countries put their interest first, and are tactical because of potential risks that could prevail. This provides an understanding as to why and how powerful countries attempt, or there lack thereof, at

mitigating conflicts, exclusively by prioritizing their interests, while still attempting to alleviate and end mass atrocities.

There is an incompatible approach to the conflict from the P5 in the UNSC. To touch upon the topic of countries that have disagreed with the approach of reacting to the conflict in Libya, Russia and Turkey have accused the Western states of overthrowing Gaddafi government for their own geopolitical interests (Reuters 2011). Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, had stated that "intervention in internal affairs, especially military interference, is unacceptable" (Siddique 2011). The examples of countries such as Russia and Turkey whose standpoint is that the West is attempting to interfere rather than protect, provides a solid contestation to the norm.

Contrary to that argument, in an article in *The United States Institute of Peace* it was stated that not only the US but also foreign powers like Russia and Turkey have used different approaches to gain control over the situation (Alsharkasi 2022). That comprised a heavy political interference which involved Russia's Wagner Group, Turkey's military presence in western Libya to sway the political atmosphere, by using drones and other forms of resistance against the HoR (House of Representatives)-appointed Prime Minister Fathi Bashaga which basically indicates that there is a form of control and approval needed from Turkey (Alsharkasi 2022). Interestingly enough, the argument of Alsharkasi (2022) gravitates more on the side of the US by arguing that "the first step to building peace is to put pressure on these countries to refrain from unilateral interventions in Libyan domestic affairs" (ibid.), and argues that the US should have a stronger role in the region, because they will provide a policy that will benefit Libya, as opposed to unilateral interventions that are counterproductive (ibid.). Intriguingly, this goes back to Thakur's argument regarding the balance of R2P and the need for multilateral and unilateral interventions, but to avoid institutionalized indifference, which he argues is

detrimental to the process of applying R2P and combating mass atrocities (Thakur 2011, 17).

To add to the argument regarding unilateral interventions, Thakur (2011) argues that,

> The real choice is not if interventions will take place, but when, why, how, by whom and under whose authority. Unilateral and ad hoc interventions will sow and nourish the seeds of international discord. Multilateral and rules-based interventions will speak powerfully to the world's determination never again to return to institutionalised indifference to mass atrocities (17).

### 4.1.3   Strategic Interests

Strategic interests of powerful states are important aspects to endeavor in because the discourse on the application of the norm suggests that the fundamental necessity and concern is the protection of populations that are not protected by their own state, in this instance Libya. However, putting R2P into practice, it has been suggested to have been used as a tool to sharpen powerful states' stance in the international order, as well as apply Western-style society, economy, and politics, rather than focus more on adjusting these institutions to local social conditions and norms, customs, and political practice (Kühn 2021).

In terms of foreign policy and enhancing domestic security of Libya and spreading influence in the international system as a powerful leading state, President Obama criticized that the international community took a whole year to react and respond to the mass atrocities committed in Bosnia ("Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya" 2011). While the US worked with international partners and achieved it in 31 days in Libya, to which he stated the measures that were taken, "…secure an international mandate to protect civilians, stop an advancing army, prevent massacre, and establish a no-fly zone with our allies and partners" (ibid.). The no-fly zone was adopted with resolution 1973[1], to which no members voted against, but Brazil, China, Germany, India, and Russia all abstained (UN Press 2011).

---

1 Resolution 1973 was passed by the UNSC in 2011 for the protection of civilians in Libya, and it enforced a no-fly zone. Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. 2019. "Resolution 1973 (Libya) S/RES/1973," accessed April 10, 2023, https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/resolution-1973-libya-s-res-1973/.

President Obama further addressed those citizens that criticized what might be selective interventions, he stated that,

> It's true that America cannot use our military wherever repression occurs. And given the costs and risks of intervention, we must always measure our interests against the need for action. But that cannot be an argument for never acting on behalf of what's right ("Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya" 2011).

In President Obama's comments and speeches regarding the actions taken in Libya stress the importance of putting the US's interests first, but also standing against mass atrocities. Moreover, President Obama argued that the US had important strategic interests in preventing Qaddafi from committing further atrocities, due to fears over the spillover effect, such as a refugee crisis, that could have potentially emerged due to the crisis among the region, affecting fragile countries like Tunisia and Egypt (ibid.). These cases display that the norm is put into practice due to the interests that the states inflict, however, it also shows that states do in fact selectively apply R2P when there are risks of their benefits, be it oil or regional control, being stripped away. Asserting their interests during the implementation of R2P may not inherently be a negative approach, as it associates with the realistic dynamics of international relations. However, the consequences are the inconsistent application of this norm weakens its effectiveness and raises apprehensions regarding prospective Western dominance within the region. Therefore, it is important for states to have a consistent approach to intervention, and not utilize it as a tool to only advance their own interests, instead focus on the protection of vulnerable populations.

Furthermore, China's position in the Libya case strikes as an opposition to the approach of the West. China's locus on R2P is nuanced, it is important to emphasize that China did endorse the concept of R2P in the 2005 UN World Summit, it goes back to the previously mentioned deviation from the actual purpose of R2P. China is committed to R2P, but in the case of the violence in Libya, China put forward its interests by practicing its neutrality policy (Alkoutami, 2020). China focused on upholding its economic and business interests in Libya, both before

25

and after the conflict, due to the capital they gained from Libya through various investments and development projects, and vice versa (ibid.). China rejected the NATO-led military intervention and aimed at reinforcing diplomatic and economic relations with countries in the MENA region (ibid). These two different approaches and reaction to the violence in Libya is indicative of how nuanced and complicated the application of R2P can be because states have different objectives and interests that directly influence their reaction to preventing and mitigating conflicts. This is where the limitation to R2P arises because it is not an international law, but a norm that was adopted and agreed upon by states yet contested in certain cases.

According to Thakur (2011),

In Libya, the West's strategic interests coincided with UN values. This does not mean that the latter was subordinated to the former. It does mean, as with Australia vis-à-vis East Timor in 1999, that there was a better prospect of sustained NATO engagement than if Western interests were not affected (23).

Thakur (2011) views strategic interests as not necessarily a negative characteristic to approaching R2P and ending mass atrocities, and thus argues that the West's interests did coincide with the UN values (ibid.). However, there is a new approach to the international order, which is the "struggle for the ascendancy of competing normative architectures based on a combination of power, understood as the disciplined application of force, and value and ideas" (ibid., 24). The author gravitates more towards the argument that there are inconsistencies, but also the norm is implemented in a formal manner regardless the extent of the implementation and the approach. Powerful states that are a part of the UNSC have shown selective applications, because as Thakur (2011) argues there are inconsistencies especially driven by Western geopolitical and oil interests, and an unequal military action in Syria, Yemen, and Palestine (20). Still, Libya depicts the first time the UNSC has authorized an R2P operation (ibid., 21).

## 4.2    The Case of Syria

### *4.2.1    Conflict Background*

The decision behind a second case study is because it will provide a counterpart stance by further exploring the geopolitical and strategic interest and how it differs from Libya. Additionally, how greater the rejection to intervene was by some states and how scholars have criticized the selective application of R2P in Syria.

According *to the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect,* the crisis is rooted in President Bashar al-Assad government's oppression of protests in 2011 (Syria - Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect 2023). As a response to this protests, al-Assad's government committed atrocities, such as the use of chemical weapons on its own population (ibid.). Moreover, the support of Russian airstrikes and Tukey's backed groups have cause violations of human rights, which has led to the fleeing of roughly 6 million Syrians (ibid.). The UNSC has passed "29 resolutions on the situation in Syria; however, none have been fully implemented and the Syrian government has directly violated many of them" (ibid.). To which ten resolutions Russia and China had vetoed (ibid.).

The conflict in Syria began as a long lasting political and economic turbulence and certain actions taken by Bashar al-Assad's regime and rebellious groups (Ferris and Kirisci 2016, 109). That being said, the international community has been accused of failing to apply R2P in Syria, as per Ferris and Kirisci (2016) (ibid.). The authors argue that there have been successful cases such as those in Libya, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, and Mali, which depicts the ability of the norm to be applied by the international community, however, the responsibility to protect was not put into full effect because "the Syrian conflict became too complex, the political interests too diverse, and the proliferation of actors too great for the UN to be able to take effective action to prevent chaos" (ibid., 111). What the authors suggest is the need for a Security Council reform, in order to tackle the inconsistencies and selectivity of applying the

norm (ibid.). Multiple resolutions were passed by the UNSC, however, most of the resolutions have been vetoed by Russia and China, which is similar to the crisis in Libya. Russia and China disagreed with constituted interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. Additionally, with this crisis the debate was born as to whether a state can use force without the approval of the UNSC (Halliyade 2016, 215). The lack of unanimity among the UNSC exemplify the issues with the emergence of norm contestation and the loss of legitimacy of the norm.

According to Mohamed (2012), "the crisis in Syria has exposed both the power and the fragility of the UN system, and it has highlighted the limited power exerted by norms of intervention to sway governments to action" (223). The author restates the role the international community has in the case that the government fails to protect its civilians, but most importantly emphasizes that R2P stands not only for the protection of civilians after a conflict has risen, but the "responsibility to prevent and a responsibility to rebuild" (ibid., 224).

Even if there were doubts surrounding military intervention and applying R2P in Syria, states such as the UK, the US, France, and Germany were coming forward with support. The US was no keen on imposing military action in Syria. However, the response of then President Obama was to react with military actions in order to prevent al-Assad from further attacks on Syrian non-combatant civilians, only after reports came in regarding the usage of poison gas, in which he commented on "… the world saw in gruesome detail the terrible nature of chemical weapons, and why the overwhelming majority of humanity has declared them off-limits -- a crime against humanity, and a violation of the laws of war" ("Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria" 2013). There was a political division among the permanent members of the Security Council thus leading to no proper decision as to how to apply R2P in Syria. This support from the UK, the US, France, and Germany proved inadequate which according to Mohamed (2012) is suggestive of the power of the UN (223), but also the power of the international community that abstained or vetoed the application of R2P (ibid.).

### 4.2.2 *Geopolitical Interests*

UNSC member states such as China stressed "the importance of respecting Syria's "sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity"" (Halliyade 2016, 221). Interestingly enough, in 2011 when the Syrian conflict was escalating not one country's statement or in the presidential statement, that was adopted by the Security Council, was R2P mentioned (ibid., 219). It was the League of Arab States (LAS) that condemned Assad's regime and the violence in Syria, and requested the Syrian government to end the violence, but, once again, there is an absence of explicit acknowledgement regarding the application of R2P (ibid.). The notion that the international community is selective is easier said than proved, however, its actions, or lack thereof, have shown that the absence of consensus among the international community to address the conflict in Syria fails not only the application of the norm, but also the civilians that are faced with atrocities.

Permanent members of the UNSC such as China and Russia have advocated against military intervention and any form of intervention because it threatens the sovereignty of Syria. However, what is shown by Simons (2021) is the mere goal of the Russian Federation becoming a geopolitical rival to the United States by exerting various influences and power in the MENA region (424). Even though, Moscow decided to impose military actions and intervene in Syria in 2015 (ibid.). According to Yacoubian (2021), the geopolitical interests of Russia are rather substantial, "specifically, Russia's endgame in Syria seeks to promote Moscow's interests in three concentric arenas: (1) Syria's multi-layered conflict; (2) Russia's role in regional/Middle East dynamics; and (3) Moscow's broader conception of an evolving global order" (Yacoubian 2021). Russia managed to maintain the current regime of Al-Assad and strengthening its power goals in the region (ibid.). The military intervention in Syria by Russia transforms into a political settlement that is in support of Russia, as well as the Assad regime (ibid.). Additionally, Russia's strategy with Syria included characteristics of "grand

strategy" (ibid.). Grand strategy is defined as a "purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so" (Brands 2014, 3). What this means is the political performance of Russia and its status with the absence of US power, by projecting its own power and authority in the region. Furthermore, the Russian foreign policy is opportunistic,

> The main characteristics of Russia's policy in the Middle East, both before and after the outbreak of the Syria crisis, have remained pragmatism, a non-ideological approach, and readiness to engage in selective cooperation with most regional actors, despite tensions between and even with them (Stepanova 2016, 8).

There are clear instances where the lack of consensus is due to pursuing unilateral approaches and achieving one's geopolitical interests ranging from security and power, and inclined by aspects such as resources, geography, and alliances that directly overshadow the use of the norm by the international community.

### 4.2.3   Strategic Interests

The UNSC proved to be more of a problem rather than a solution in terms of protecting vulnerable populations in Syria (Alvarez 2022). Due to political divisions, the UNSC was unsuccessful with the prevention of mass atrocities due to various interests that concerned other states and not the state or citizens that were on the receiving end of the conflict (ibid.). Russia's strategic interest in Syria are arm and defense equipment buyer and preserving a naval presence in Tartus (Alvarez 2020). On the contrary for the West and the Arab League's strategic interest in Syria democratic government, challenging Russian influence in the region, protecting Israel's security, militarily and diplomatically estrange Syria from Iran (Alvarez 2020). These political divisions among the international community demonstrates the discord and overshadowing of the actual solutions needed to tackle mass atrocities. But this traces back to arguments such as the fragility of the UN (Mohamed 2012, 223).

Although, the case of Libya is seen as a success, to the extent of overthrowing the Gaddafi's regime and by passing the Resolution 1973, the conundrum is that some UN member states were perplexed between the actual use and meaning of R2P since its implementation in Libya triggered the question whether it was for the protection of civilians or regime change (Akbarzadeh and Saba 2019, 527). Which is argued to have been the reason why Russia and China vetoed eight Security Council resolutions (Alvarez 2022). On the contrary, Alex J. Bellamy (2014), who is an advocate and scholar of R2P, argues that it is not as simplistic as arguing that UN's response in Syria is the way it is because of the decisions made in Libya, instead he argues that,

> Russia's significant economic and strategic interests in Syria (including arms sales and its naval facility at the Syrian port of Tartus) and concern over the spread of radical Islamist groups in Russia's neighborhood best explain Russia (and China's) vetoes and their steadfast support for the Syrian regime (Bellamy 2014, 37. As cited in Akbarzadeh and Saba 2019, 541).

Akbarzadeh and Saba (2019) point out that President Putin himself commented on how Syria contributes to Russia's own economy, "five to ten per cent of Russia's total arms exports abroad and that this percentage has grown following the 2011 Syrian crisis (542). This goes back to the argument of Russia attempting to exert its influence, as a substitute of Western influence in the region (ibid.).

Budling upon the previous discussion, looking into the US response of different presidents will show the varying state's interests. For instance, Trump shifted the narrative as to what the strategic interests were of the US in relation to Syria, to which he openly argued that,

> Other people can patrol the border of Syria ... and Turkey. Let them. They've been fighting for a thousand years. Let them do the border. We don't want to do that. We want to bring our soldiers home. But we did leave soldiers because we're keeping the oil. I like oil. We're keeping the oil (Farsnews Agency, 2019).

Although, the narrative changed from the Obama to the Trump and to the Biden presidency, it is not new that the US has interest in the oil in Syria, similarly to Libya, because during the

Obama administration various US companies applied for licenses in oil and gas in northeastern Syria (Trahan 2021, 34). To which the Biden administration blockaded trade in Syria, and heavily profited from oil reserves in the region (ibid.).

The lack of consensus and different applications of R2P, as seen in Libya and Syria, it is not possible to attribute the inconsistency to a singular explanation. What can be seen in this analysis is that different UNSC member states have different interpretations of the norm, and different interests, thus affecting the application. For countries such as Russia and China it is a violation on sovereignty and regime change (the case of Libya), while for other Western countries, R2P, is a necessary norm or an instrument for preventing mass atrocities, protecting vulnerable communities, and basically holding states accountable for infringing on human rights. Nonetheless, although Western countries are willing to implement R2P in case of crisis and mass atrocities, the US still puts its interest forward. But so do other UNSC member states that have abstained or vetoed resolutions in relation to protecting vulnerable populations, as a result of their own geopolitical and strategic interests. Needless to say, the lack of cooperation and unanimity among the UNSC member states has contributed to norm contestation and weakening of the international order, where countries prioritize their own interests over aiding vulnerable communities.

## Conclusion

This thesis dissertation has analyzed, through discourse analysis, the constraints and difficulties that arise with R2P. Although, R2P has been applied in countries, such as Libya, it remains contested by scholars, policy makers, politicians, etc. for the lack of application in other countries. The norm remains complex with its extensive amount of contestation. Given the extensive discourse on R2P, the evolution of R2P continues to unfold, demonstrating a requisite for reassessment and modifications. Through various speeches, resolutions, and academic resources, it has facilitated an understanding of the convolution of R2P, and its application. That includes its legal limitations, power dynamics, state behavior, and the intricacy between sovereignty and international intervention. However, the primary objective of this thesis was to critically examine the limitations inherent in the international norm, while also exploring how states observe this norm and establish its application. The focus to limit the case studies to two countries, those being Libya and Syria, was to show the difference in states behavior in terms of the reaction or unresponsiveness to mass atrocities, and how states put their geopolitical and strategic interests forward in the decision-making process. The case of Libya led to some UNSC member states, and non-UNSC member states, to consider the change of regime as an infringement of state sovereignty, therefore inciting reluctance, and lack of cooperation.

Chapter 3 served as a foundational chapter that delved into the contestation of the norm, its limitations, and the normative resistance. The R2P norm has endured resistance, as previously mentioned, due to the belief that there are underlying motives behind applying the norm. As mentioned by scholars, such as Bellamy (2013), the resistance can be rooted in the fears of neo-imperialist or Western imposed interventions to gain control over fragile states, or as some scholars argue, such as Tarnagorski (2012), as a result of the outcomes in Libya, regime change and fear of infringing state sovereignty.

The purpose of this thesis was to understand how geopolitical and strategic interests of powerful states influence the implementation of R2P. In chapter 4, these interests exert influence on the decision-making processes and the approaches towards reacting to mass atrocities. Those interests include procuring access to resources, upholding their alliance commitment, and fostering regional stability. When a state believes that its own interests are potentially at risk, then the application of the R2P norm is often hindered. The inconsistency of R2P cannot be attributed to a solitary factor. The UNSC has permanent members that have different ideologies, approaches, and interpretations of the international norm. As previously mentioned in chapter 4, countries such as China and Russia who are a part of the P-5 rejected various resolutions in relation to Syria, which ties into the elaborate relationship between geopolitical and strategic interests, have taken a different approach in Syria, due to the belief that it would be an infringement of state sovereignty. The implementation of R2P in Libya elicited widespread debates due to the subsequent regime change, a decision that led to the subsequent impediment of implementing R2P in the context of Syria.

This research has provided a critical overview and analysis of the implementation of R2P by partaking in the debate of norm contestation, and by introducing a narrowed down analysis on understanding the geopolitical and strategic interests of states, and how it can play a part in understanding the complexity of the implementation of R2P. However, it is important to mention the limitations to this thesis. Primarily, the analysis on other countries with failed or successful implementations of R2P, other than Libya and Syria, could have enriched and intensified this thesis. Additionally, the resources used in this thesis are accessible academic and news resources, which are primarily written by Western media and academics, thus providing a limited scope and understanding of how R2P could be perceived in non-Western countries. For future research endeavors, inclusion of locals that have experienced war and mass atrocities, through ethnographic research, could provide a more extensive understanding,

and obtain results that will demonstrate more broadly the successful and failed implementations

of R2P.

# Bibliography

Aboagye, Col Festus Boahen, Alex J. Bellamy, Malte Brosig, and Lars Brozus. 2012. "The Responsibility to Protect - From Evasive to Reluctant Action ? The Role of Global Middle Powers." *Institute for Security Studies (ISS)*. https://www.africaportal.org/publications/the-responsibility-to-protect-from-evasive-to-reluctant-action-the-role-of-global-middle-powers/.

Akbarzadeh, Shahram, and Arif Saba. 2019. "UN Paralysis over Syria: The Responsibility to Protect or Regime Change?" *International Politics* 56 (4): 536–50. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-018-0149-x.

Alkoutami, Frederic Wehrey Sandy. 2020. "China's Balancing Act in Libya." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, accessed May 10, 2023. https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/10/china-s-balancing-act-in-libya-pub-81757.

Alsharkasi, Ahmed. 2022."From Factionalism to Foreign Interference: Libya's Conflict Remains Frozen." *United States Institute of Peace*, accessed January 10, 2023, https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/factionalism-foreign-interference-libyas-conflict-remains-frozen.

Alvarez, Julia Garcia. 2022. "The Responsibility to Protect in Libya and Syria War Conflicts." *European Student Think Tank,* accessed March 15, 2023, https://esthinktank.com/2022/06/13/the-responsibility-to-protect-in-libya-and-syria-war-conflicts/.

Auf, Omar. 2023. "Navigating R2P Between Norm and Practice." *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, accessed February 24, 2023. https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/navigating-r2p-between-norm-and-practice/.

Auger, A. Vincent. 2011. "The Responsibility to Protect: Six Years After." *ASPJ Africa and Francophonie*, (2): 84-96. https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/ASPJ_French/journals_E/Volume-02_Issue-2/auger_e.pdf

Australian Red Cross. 2011. "International humanitarian law and the responsibility to protect: a handbook," accessed April 2, 2023, https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms-assets/documents/about-us/ihl-r2p-responsibility-to-protect.pdf

Badescu, Cristina G., and Thomas G. Weiss. 2010. "Misrepresenting R2P and Advancing Norms: An Alternative Spiral?" *International Studies Perspectives* 11 (4): 354–74. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2010.00412.x.

Bellamy, Alex J. 2008. "The Responsibility to Protect and the Problem of Military Intervention." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 84, no. (4): 615–39. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25144868.

Bellamy, Alex J. 2013. "The Responsibility to Protect: Added Value or Hot Air?" *Cooperation and Conflict* 48 (3): 333–57. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836713482448.

Bellamy, Alex J. 2014. 'From Tripoli to Damascus? Lesson Learning and the Implementation of the Responsibility to Protect', *International Politics*, vol. 51, no. (1): p. 37. As cited in Akbarzadeh, Shahram, and Arif Saba. 2019. "UN Paralysis over Syria: The Responsibility to Protect or Regime Change?" *International Politics* 56 (4): 536–50. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-018-0149-x.

Bellamy, Alex J., and Sara E. Davies. 2009. "The Responsibility to Protect in the Asia-Pacific Region." *Security Dialogue* 40 (6): 547–74. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010609349907.

Bloomfield, Alan. 2016. "Norm Antipreneurs and Theorising Resistance to Normative Change." *Review of International Studies* 42 (2): 310–33. https://doi.org/10.1017/s026021051500025x.

Brands, Hal. 2014. "Introduction: The Meaning and Challenge of Grand Strategy." In "What Good Is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush", 1–16. *Cornell University Press*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt5hh0bc.5.

Deitelhoff, Nicole, and Lisbeth Zimmermann. 2018. "Things We Lost in the Fire: How Different Types of Contestation Affect the Robustness of International Norms." *International Studies Review*, 51-76. https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viy080.

Dr, Muditha Halliyade. 2016. "Syria - Another Drawback for R2P?: An Analysis of R2P's Failure to Change International Law on Humanitarian Intervention." *Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equality* 4 (2): 215–47. https://paperity.org/p/82806854/syria-another-drawback-for-r2p-an-analysis-of-r2ps-failure-to-change-international-law-on.

Evans, Gareth J.O. 2008. "The Responsibility to Protect: An Idea Whose Time Has Come … and Gone?" *International Relations* 22 (3): 283–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117808094173.

Farsnews Agency. 2019. "'I Like Oil, We're Keeping Oil': Trump Confirms US Wants Syria's Oil, Not to Patrol Its Borders," accessed May 1, 2023, https://www.farsnews.ir/en/news/13980811000805/%E2%80%98I-Like-Oil-We%E2%80%99re-Keeping-Oil%E2%80%99-Trmp-Cnfirms-US-Wans-Syria%E2%80%99s-Oil-N-.

Ferris, Elizabeth, and Kemal Kirisci. 2016. "Syrian Displacement and the International Order." In "The Consequences of Chaos: Syria's Humanitarian Crisis and the Failure to Protect", 109–42. *Brookings Institution Press*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1c2cqws.9.

Foot, Rosemary. 2011. "The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and Its Evolution: Beijing's Influence on Norm Creation in Humanitarian Areas." *St Antony's International Review* 6, no. (2): 47–66. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26226764.

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. 2019. "Resolution 1973 (Libya) S/RES/1973." *Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*," accessed April 10, 2023, https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/resolution-1973-libya-s-res-1973/.

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. 2022. "What Is R2P? - Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect," accessed March 27, 2023, https://www.globalr2p.org/what-is-r2p/.

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. 2023. "Libya - Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect," accessed March 12, 2023, https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/libya/.

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. 2023. "Syria - Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect," accessed March 13, 2023, https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/syria/.

Hehir, Aidan. 2013. "The Permanence of Inconsistency: Libya, the Security Council, and the Responsibility to Protect." *International Security* 38, no. (1): 137–59. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24480572.

Hofmann, Gregor, and Lisbeth Zimmermann. 2019. "Introduction: Norm Contestation and its Effects: Challenges to the Responsibility to Protect and the Responsibility to Prosecute." *Global Responsibility to Protect* (11): 137-48. https://doi.org/10.1163/1875984X-01102002.

Homans, George C. Social Behavior: Its Ele- mentary Forms (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1961), p. 46. As cited in Gibbs, Jack P. "Norms: The Problem of Definition and Classification." *American Journal of Sociology* 70, no. 5 (1965): 586–94. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2774978

Johnson, Harry M. Sociology (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1960), p. 8. As cited in Gibbs, Jack P. "Norms: The Problem of Definition and Classification." *American Journal of Sociology* 70, no. 5 (1965): 586–94. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2774978

Kühn, Florian P. 2021. "The Unravelling of the Afghan Potemkin Village." *Blogal Studies*, accessed December 13, 2022, https://www.blogalstudies.com/post/the-unravelling-of-the-afghan-potemkin-village

Kunadt, Nadja. 2011. "The Responsibility to Protect as a General Principle of International Law," accessed April 4, 2023, https://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1870-46542011000100007

Manzoor, Hina, Sumera Saeed, and Abdul Haleem Panhwar. 2019. "Use of Discourse Analysis in Various Disciplines." *International Journal of English Linguistics* 9 (3): 301-9. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n3p301

Mazzanti, Maria. 2013. "From State Sovereignty to Responsibility to Protect." PhD Dissertation, Sciences Po, 5-435, https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-03657509/document

Mohamed, Saira. 2012. "Syria, the United Nations, and the Responsibility to Protect." *American Society of International Law* 106: 223–26. https://doi.org/10.5305/procannmeetasil.106.0223.

National Archives and Records Administration. 2022. "United Nations Charter (1945)," accessed March 25, 2023, www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/united-nations-charter#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20was%20established,circumstances%20following%20World%20War%20I.

Pommier, Bruno. 2011. "The use of force to protect civilians and humanitarian action: the case of Libya and beyond." *International Review of the Red Cross* Vol. 93, (884): 1063-1083. https://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r29540.pdf

Reinold, Theresa. 2010. "The Responsibility to Protect – Much Ado about Nothing?" *Review of International Studies* 36 (S1): 55–78. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0260210510000446.

Reuters. 2011."Russia: Outside Meddling in Libya 'Unacceptable,'" accessed March 15, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-libya-lavrov-idUSTRE72919Y20110310.

Rhoads, Emily Paddon, and Jennifer M. Welsh. 2019. "Close Cousins in Protection: The Evolution of Two Norms." *International Affairs* 95 (3): 597–617. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz054.

Roth, Brad R. 2011. "A Different Sovereignty Discourse." In *Oxford University Press EBooks*, 4–18. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195342666.003.0001.

Ruggie, John, "*Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity:Toward a Neorealist Synthesis*" in Keohane, Robert O., "*Neorealism and Its Critics*", Colombia University Press, 1986. As cited in Jeppsson, Jon. 2009. "Contesting Illegality A Critical Examination of the Unlawfulness of Humanitarian Interventions." 1-35, BA Thesis, Lund University.

Siddique, Haroon. 2011. "Libya Uprising - Thursday 10 March." *The Guardian*, accessed March 17, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2011/mar/10/libya-uprising-gaddafi-live#block-25.

Simonovic, Ivan. 2016. "The Responsibility to Protect." *United Nations Human Rights* 53 no. 4, www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/responsibility-protect.

Stepanova, Ekaterina. 2016. "Russia in the Middle East: Back to a "Grand Strategy" – or Enforcing Multilateralism?" *Politique étrangère* (2): 23-35. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pe2_stepanova_ok.pdf

Tarnagorski, Rafal. 2012. "Libya and Syria: Responsibility to Protect at a Crossroads." *The Polish Intitute of International Affairs (26):* 1-6. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155275/PISM%20Strategic%20File%20no%2026.pdf

Thakur, Ramesh. 2002. "Outlook: Intervention, Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect: Experiences from ICISS." *Security Dialogue* 33 (3): 323–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010602033003007.

Thakur, Ramesh. 2011."Libya and the Responsibility to Protect: Between Opportunistic Humanitarianism and Value-Free Pragmatism." *Security Challenges* 7, no. (4): 13–25. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26467113.

Trahan, Nikola Jana. 2021. "The Responsibility to Protect and Syria- Looking at the Future of Humanitarian Intervention." *Honors Projects Overview (208): 1-44.* https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/honors_projects/208

TRT World. 2022. "Why Is the US Trying to Manage Libyan Oil Revenues?" accessed April 14, 2023, https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/why-is-the-us-trying-to-manage-libyan-oil-revenues-56354.

United Nations. n.d. "United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect," accessed April 30, 2023, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/about-responsibility-to-protect.shtml.

Whitehouse.Gov. 2011. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya," accessed March 13, 2023, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/28/remarks-President-address-nation-libya.

Whitehouse.Gov. 2013. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria," accessed March 13, 2023, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/10/remarks-president-address-nation-syria.

Wiener, Antje. 2020. "The Concept of Norm Contestation - Interview with Antje Wiener." *ResearchGate*, no. 4: 1–8. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338740757_The_Concept_of_Norm_Contestation_-_Interview_with_Antje_Wiener.

Williams, Matthew. 2012. "Constructivism Is Concerned with Norms, but Is It Normative Theory?" *E-International Relations*, accessed January 15, 2023, https://www.e-ir.info/2008/07/29/constructivism-is-concerned-with-norms-but-is-it-normative-theory/.

Wolf, Katharina. 2012. "R2P - A Case for Norm Localisation. The Responsibility to Potect - From Evasive to Reluctant Action? The Role of Global Middle Powers." *Institute for Security Studies,* accessed May 7, 2023, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155245/Full_FromEvasiveReluctantAction.pdf.

Yacoubian, Mona. 2021. "What Is Russia's Endgame in Syria?" *United States Institute of Peace*, accessed February 17, 2023, https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/02/what-russias-endgame-syria.