

Opinion

R2P needs a champion in today's global political scene

Promoting the protection of civilians is a good way to show the world that 'Canada is back.'



Lloyd Axworthy, Allan Rock

Responsibility to protect

In his first three months in office, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has made clear his intention to pursue an activist and ambitious agenda for the world's

foremost multilateral institution. Guterres established a reputation for courageous leadership and skillful management during his decade as chief of the UN refugee agency, and demonstrated his political acumen while serving as a successful prime minister of Portugal.

Those skills will be put to the test in today's fractious international environment, where a growing trend among many member states towards anti-internationalist attitudes is undermining norms of global cooperation.

Some even question whether the global order and its institutions, methodically constructed since 1945, can survive this hostile climate. The current framework is far from perfect, but it has enabled decades of stability, increasing prosperity and relative peace. It is based, however, on a commitment by each state to collective decision-making and burden-sharing that may now be in question. Brexit signals Britain's repudiation of the collective mod-

el in the context of the EU. Some eastern European governments are rejecting accepted norms of pluralism. Imminent elections in France and Germany threaten to accelerate this inward-looking tendency, driven by political leaders who are exploiting fears of immigration. And the Trump administration is threatening drastic reductions in its financial contributions to all aspects of UN operations, including peacekeeping, child protection, and global public health.

We look to the new secretary-general to promote an international order grounded in the rule of law and human rights, with a renewed commitment to finding collective solutions to tough global issues. In that effort, he is entitled to expect Canada's help. Prime Minister Trudeau's declaration that "Canada is back" signals a return to our accustomed role as a champion of constructive multilateralism. The need for our good global citizenship has never been greater. Among its first priorities, Canada must try to persuade Trump that reducing support for the UN is not in America's interests.

One important tool for collective action has its origin in Canadian policy innovation. The "responsibility to protect" initiative, or R2P, grew out of a recognition in the late 90's that a way had to be found to respond collectively to atrocities like those in Rwanda, Srebrenica, and Kosovo. Civilians were being murdered with impunity by their own governments, or by others that their governments were unable or unwilling to stop. Canada established an international commission to search



UN secretary-general António Guterres will need some help as he tries to foster international cooperation and multilateralism. Photograph by Eskinder Debebe courtesy of the UN.

for answers that would enable the international community to provide protection for civilians at risk within the borders of a single sovereign state, while still recognizing sovereignty as the cornerstone of the international system.

The current crises in South Sudan, Myanmar, and Burundi are prime and urgent examples of the need for R2P.

R2P was unanimously adopted by UN member states in 2005, thereby changing the concept of sovereignty forever. Mass atrocity crimes within a single state are now seen as legitimate subjects of international, not just domestic, concern. The prerogatives of the sovereign state are now regarded as earned, based on whether it protects its citizens, an unprecedented departure from centuries of unconditional loyalty to the absolute nature of state sovereignty.

The logic of R2P is increasingly being applied to a wider range of issues including climate change, migration and the protection of cultural heritage.

The emergence of R2P as an accepted norm suffered a setback in 2011 when a protective

mission in Libya, authorized by the Security Council, was improperly used by NATO as a pretence to effect regime-change. That over-reach angered many member states who viewed it as a betrayal. Canada can take the lead in promoting safeguards against such abuses in the future, helping to restore R2P's momentum and regain the trust and confidence that was lost.

On Wednesday a forum in Vancouver sponsored by the Simons Foundation will bring policy makers and practitioners together to examine strategies to strengthen and promote R2P, and to ensure that it survives both the unhappy experience in Libya and the current tendency to fragment the international order.

It is a crucial effort, and one in which Canada is well-positioned to play an important part.

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The Hill Times

We are missing the boat on public diplomacy

Canada needs to bring back the Understanding Canada program to fund international Canadian studies.



John W. Graham, Munroe Eagles

Canadian studies abroad

The prime minister and his team, with a little help from former prime minister Brian Mulroney, have mounted a smart and, so far, successful campaign with United States President Donald Trump and his associates to sustain civil dialogue and the flow of bilateral trade.

Yet, as we are reminded daily, we live at a time of unparalleled

unpredictability. This begs the question: are we doing all that we reasonably can to reinforce our image as an invaluable partner? The answer is no. We are missing the boat on public diplomacy.

A key element in Canada's public diplomacy program was called Understanding Canada. In the United States, as elsewhere, Canada's interests are best served when the citizens know about and appreciate our significance. Efforts to raise our profile south of the border are not made any easier by the very closeness of the relationship. Americans tend to benignly regard Canadians as very much like themselves. As a result they are often ill-equipped to understand situations where Canada's interests diverge from their own. The Understanding Canada program was designed to address this need.

Although, it was probably the most cost-effective of all of the foreign ministry's small-scale programs, it was cancelled by the Stephen Harper government and has not yet been reinstated by Justin Trudeau's government.

Managing the Canada-U.S. relationship, with its extraordinarily complex networks, remains our primary diplomatic challenge. While attention focuses on the role played by political leaders and diplomats in Washington and Ottawa, Canadians understand that the country's interests can also be advanced outside the two capitals. In addition to the embassy, Canada maintains 12 consulates general and three trade offices throughout the United States. Although their need to "message" their constituencies has probably never been as acute as it is now, these offices have been handicapped by the loss of the Understanding Canada program.

In the past, Canada's efforts at public diplomacy actively enlisted local academics. In the United States, hundreds of academics located in every corner of the country accessed modest funds available through embassy and consulate programs to conduct research and develop courses that introduced thousands of university students—the country's future opinion leaders and decision-makers—to Canada. The academics also served as media resources to help interpret Canada-related developments for the general public.



Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland would be wise to restart the Understanding Canada program to reinforce Canada's image in the U.S. as an invaluable partner, the authors argue. The Hill Times photograph by Jake Wright

American academics were able to leverage these investments with their own administrations, often obtaining dollar-for-dollar matches. Although the program cost Canadian taxpayers about \$5.5-million worldwide, the return on the expenditure to the Canadian economy has been estimated at many times that amount. In the United States, this program was seen as a huge asset by past ambassadors and consuls general.

Recreating from scratch the Understanding Canada (Canadian Studies) program in the U.S. and around the world with a network of several thousand scholars knowledgeable about Canada and communicating their interests to widening segments of their populations would be inconceivable without the expenditure of huge sums. Much of this network survives. However, it has

been seriously undermined by the previous government's decision and now by further delay.

There is some resentment in the global Canadianist academic community, but, above all, incredulity. Inevitably the erosion is ongoing. There is a need to move quickly—and in the United States, very quickly—before the network suffers grievously from further neglect and attrition. The biggest victim of further neglect would be Canada's self-interest.

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