



## Towards Operationalization of RtoP

In my article “RtoP in Headwind”<sup>1</sup> posted on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the norm Responsibility to Protect I listed some disadvantageous evolutions in the international conditions which impede the implementation of the norm.

Sadly, the environment has further deteriorated since then.

- The shift towards the multipolar international order, which some analysts qualify as “post liberal international order” has led to divergence, sometimes including a split between leading global actors and there is even the looming prospect of a blocking led by the USA and China.
- The competition and rivalry for spheres of interest have sharpened between the “West”, characterized by the powers of liberal democracy representing pluralism, equal rights of individuals, hyper-globalization and universalism, on the one side, and the “East”<sup>2</sup>, featured by autocracies who give priority to homogeneity, nationalism and identity-related issues, on the other side.
- Processes of polarization and erosion of social peace have advanced within societies regardless whether they belong to West or East.
- The common feature of these trends is the increase of hatred and the significant role of state actors in fueling hostilities and group enmities.
- Tools of digitalization and artificial intelligence are increasingly misused to generate hatred, polarization, violation of fundamental human rights and escalation of conflict situations.
- Autocratic regimes have strengthened the norm of non-intervention, put more emphasis on cultural specificity, and sought to weaken efforts towards multilateral investigation and resolution of even extreme human rights violations.
- The changing world order provides new framework and opportunities for the conflicting interpretations and discourse around some elements of the norm of RtoP that sets back its operationalization.

When attempting to address these adverse trends we should take into account the lessons learned from the history over the last one hundred years which have shown that exportation”, by contemporary terminology, “promotion” of any ideology or set of values may not lead to total victory. A world order where one ideology and one set of values prevail is wishful thinking. Any “victory” of one of the rivaling parties, therefore, should be considered as

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.genocideprevention.eu/en/news/232-rtop-in-headwind>

<sup>2</sup> “West” and “East” are political and not geographical categories.

partial and temporary in historical terms. Hence, different world views will have to live side by side, each nation will have to select the most attractive ones, however, the accepted universal standards, such as RtoP must be respected and implemented regardless of what sort of world views share a nation.

Nevertheless, even in the future, we shall have to live with the systematic attempts of the great powers and blocks to provide “support” for states and governments showing willingness to take over their system or set of values. Consequently, the rivalry of ideologies and pursuit of geostrategic interests will recurrently increase the risks of conflicts and impede the defense of universal values and universal human rights.

From the history of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we could also draw the conclusion that when addressing volatile conflict situations in the slightest hope for preventing or halting mass atrocities the international community and actors must consider “security” and “rule of law” as key guiding principles of settlement and must accept that tradeoffs in the pursuit of values and ideologies are unavoidable.

In that environment, it is of growing dilemma how to

- counter the manifesting trends of polarization and erosion of social peace;
- facilitate the transformation of hostile human relations into relationships that makes possible peaceful resolution of conflicts;
- comply universal human rights and values with cultural specificities.

For addressing the challenges, dialogue looks an effective tool as it may transform the adverse and even hostile relations into relationships where despite the different views, actors listen carefully to the “others” and explore thoroughly the motivations without labeling and stigmatizing them. Such an approach allows for holding in check the adverse trends, and the transformed relationships may over time lead to some settlement which ensures sustainable peace and security and the prevail of rule of law.

However, in parallel, the anticipated prolongation and even amplification of the “headwind” make increasingly imperative the need to accelerate the efforts for operationalization of the norm RtoP. To that end, the tools and tasks recommended by the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, international organizations, the Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes and several NGOs acting in this domain should be more consistently implemented and complemented by additional measures. Clearly, pending on the risks of mass atrocities and the extant “immunity” of states the ideas below vary in each state.

- The national early warning and early action capacities should be extensively enhanced by putting the currently sporadic, fragmented and voluntary national activities on regular and professional basis. The alone-standing national RtoP focal points will have to be replaced by webs of Anti-Polarization Focal Points (APFPs) appointed at city levels. The web of APFPs should monitor the trends of polarization, hatred and hate speech. (During the last few years, there have been developed several methodologies in this field.) Furthermore, the APFPs should be tasked with building multi-agency communities, facilitating dialogue between hostile groups and improving education of human rights related issues.

It is key that APFPs will be integrated in the staff of city managements and their activities will not be undertaken on voluntary basis any more.

- Regional organizations possessing credibility and reputation among member states should be encouraged to assume more role in operationalization despite the increasing rhetoric of nationalists and populists against “federalist” aspirations. Regional organizations are in much better position than other international institutions to know the cultural specificity of the concerned nations that helps a lot in harmonizing the “universal” and “local” criteria when assessing situations at risk and defining the tools for addressing the challenges.
- Education of “peace”, “human rights” and “dialogue” should be combined and chiefly, incorporated in formal education curricula. Thus, it should be boosted to society level. That should replace the extant practice which in many states allows for shaping the human rights attitude of youth mainly beyond formal education and by volunteers. At present, the education is fragmented and the amount of youth reached out is rather limited, consequently, inefficient. But even the humble results and vague conditions of capacity building of youth are weakened by the fact that in several states the space of civil actors is shrunk, the possibilities for dissemination of universal values are limited.
- Digitalization and artificial intelligence should be better used for sharing best practices and resources in education. Universal online tools and programs for education of peace, human rights and dialogue will have to be elaborated and disseminated across the globe through globalization of collaboration. State and civil actors at both national and international levels should interact within a “globalized” framework to both produce and share these tools which should, of course, be tailored to the local circumstances.
- Capacity building of teachers and activists should be organized by regional organizations in both online and offline format as they can relay the universal values in a credible manner and with the necessary empathy to local conditions. As a result of training the participants should be enabled to train their peers and thus, multiply the efforts at national level.
- The implementation of the abovementioned ideas demands substantial additional resources. Based on careful calculations, donors should raise and allocate labeled “RtoP-funds” for states and governments for operationalization of the norm and ensure that the resources will properly and effectively be used.
- In the case of the third pillar of RtoP, regional organizations should elaborate and agree protocols of procedures which will enable them to introduce coercive measures in gradual and proportional manner. Thus, preventing and halting of mass atrocities will not be hostage of the rivalry between the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council.
- Given the divergences in views, interpretations and approaches to the norm and operationalization of RtoP, consultations should be launched and encouraged between the advocates and critics of the norm RtoP to help reinforce the RtoP platform and pool the international community, including both scholars and practitioners in that context.

I am convinced that the anticipated launch of the European Regional Initiative within the Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes will add new energies to the operationalization of RtoP in terms of both Europe and the entire international community.

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Definitely, the suggestions are not undisputable and do not constitute an exhaustive list. Any further ideas are most welcome!

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