Rethinking Responsibility:
Towards a New Authoritarian Interventionism?

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Military Humanitarianism beyond Western States

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„This is a war to protect the people of Yemen and defend its legitimate government“

(Saudi Arabia's Ambassador in the U.S.,
Sheik al-Jubeir, CBS 2015)

I. Introduction

Ten years after its endorsement by heads of states at the U.N. world summit (Bannon 2005; Weiss 2006), the status and meaning of the *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) remain disputed. One major debate centers on the R2P's applicability to a range of situations, implementation challenges with regard to the three pillars (prevent, react, rebuild) and questions of legitimate authorization (Deng 1996; Welsh/Band 2011; Thakur 2006). Scholars and practitioners also struggled with categorizations, i.e. whether or not the R2P has to be regarded as emerging norm (Stahn 2007). Another major debate was fundamentally about the legitimacy of the R2P. Whereas critical voices characterized the R2P as a Western hegemonic or "imperialist" (Chimni 2013) project and a mere cover for illegitimate policies of regime change (Chandler 2011, 2004; Cunliffe 2011a, 2011b; Hehir 2013b; McCormack 2011; Reinold 2014; Santos Pereira 2011), others defended the R2P as an essentially cosmopolitan and universalist concept that was not reducible to power politics (Bellamy 2015; O'Hagan 2015). Unsurprisingly, NATO's controversial military intervention in Libya 2011 (Bellamy/Williams 2011; Dembinski/Reinold 2011; Doyle 2016; Hehir 2013a; Hehir/Murray 2013, Morris 2013, Thakur 2013) as well as its non-intervention in Syria (Morris 2013; Thakur 2013) reinforced the view of R2P critics who continue to see the R2P as an encroachment on the sovereignty of the weak and as a principle that is selectively applied by Western states to pursue strategic, economic, or ideological interests.

At the same time, however, we observe a puzzling tendency among some non-Western and authoritarian states to couch their own military interventions in a humanitarian language. Russia's interventions in Georgia 2008 (Allison 2008; Matveeva 2013; Mouritzen/Wivel 2012b, 2012c) and in the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine 2014, where reasoning of "protecting Russian civilians" appeared coupled with geopolitical motives (Mouritzen/Wivel 2012d) and irredentism, are one case in point. In a similar vein, Russia is justifying her "invited" intervention in Syria as an effort to protect the Syrian people against "barbarian" forces, labelling essentially every non-ally of the Assad regime as terrorists organization (Allison 2013; Menkiszak 2013; Trenin 2012). Saudi-Arabia's intervention in the civil war in Yemen seems to be another recent case of a *new military humanitarianism by authoritarian states*, given that Saudi-Arabian policy-makers and diplomats justify their country's military engagement by references to humanitarian reasons.

A note on concepts and definitions might be required at this point. By categorizing these interventions as instances of military humanitarianism we do, of course, not assume humanitarian

motives on the part of Russian or Saudi-Arabian decision-makers. Neither do we suggest that these actions in effect contribute to humanitarian goals. Our definition of humanitarian interventions or military humanitarianism is solely based on the way military force is legitimized in these cases. It is also worth reminding that the coupling of *authoritarian interventionism* with explicit humanitarian reasoning is not a new phenomenon: The history of humanitarian interventions (Simpson 2004; Simms/Trim 2014; Heraclides/Dialla 2015a) shows that non-democratic European states such as the Holy Alliance (Prussia, Russia, Habsburg-Austria) in the 19th century as well as non-Western authoritarian states such as Vietnam and Tanzania in the 1970s did intervene in other states with the declared aim to protect nationals and strangers, or ethnic, religious and cultural minorities (see part II. of the paper). That being said, we argue that in the last ten years, in the course of what IR theorists call a power shift or power transition in world politics (Mouritzen/Wivel 2012: 187-200; Rauch/Wurm 2013), cases of *authoritarian humanitarian interventionism* tend to proliferate.

The literature on the R2P, however, has remained rather silent on this phenomenon so far. Those who defend the R2P's liberal credentials (Bellamy 2011, 2009; Cunliffe 2011a; Fiott/Koops 2014; Gallagher/Brown 2016; Glanville 2014.; Hehir 2012; Knight/Egerton 2012) do not sufficiently take into account the possible counterargument of authoritarian interventionism. An exception is Gerrit Kurtz' and Philipp Rotmann's edited volume about the R2P discourse of major powers (Kurtz/Rotmann 2016). In that volume, Russian references to the R2P are not simply reduced to a cynical cover for geo-strategic interests. Rather, the "parodic appropriation of normative language" is said to have a "destabilizing impact, and thus plays a role in the contested evolution of global norms" (Burai 2016: 67). Also, Russian foreign policy discourse is characterized as deliberate "form of resistance to the perceived liberal hegemony of the West" (Kurowska 2014: 489). We will come back to such parodies or counter-hegemonic discourses in our conclusion.

What is missing from these early accounts of humanitarian authoritarian interventionism, however, is a better understanding of the conceptual and historical relationship between regime type and the R2P. This paper aims to contribute some ideas in this regard. It is divided into three parts. We continue providing the scene of our research by telling a short history about humanitarian interventions of non-democratic states from the 19th century until today (**II.**). Following this, we argue that contemporary assumptions of a nexus between democracy and liberal peace on the one hand, and the R2P on the other is unsustainable for a number of conceptional and empirical reasons (**III.**). Finally, we present a very rough first draft of the Russian and Saudi-Arabia cases of authoritarian interventionism that both rely on humanitarian reasoning as legitimization strategy, and implicitly or explicitly refer to the R2P (**IV.**). We conclude with an outline of possible research agendas (**V.**)

II. The long history of *Military Humanitarianism*

Authoritarian interventionism that uses the language of humanitarian ideas is nothing but a new phenomenon: The long history of humanitarian interventions reveals many instances, where non-democratic European as well as non-Western authoritarian states took the opportunity to intervene in other states after ethnic and religious minorities were threatened by punishment, slavery, war and genocide (Trim/Simms 2011: 18, 21; Finnemore 2003: 52-84). It is also well documented that those intervening states did justify their interventions with a "right" und "duty to protect" (Simms/Trim 2011: 397). Even efforts by the Roman Empire to protect Roman citizens beyond borders (Hilpold 2013) or interventions to protect foreign population from the tyranny of the absolutistic Sovereign in the early Modern Europe (Trim 2011) might qualify as precursors of the idea of a responsibility to protect.

Humanitarian interventions in the 19th century

The first "high noon of intervention" (Trim/Simms 2011: 21) happened during the 19th century within Europe. Instead of religious norms, that used to be salient before, *humanitarian reasoning* more and more became an acceptable justification for waging war to protect civilians. Despite of the legalization of the principle of *sovereignty* of *all* European states at the Vienna Congress in 1815 (Ikenberry 2001; Jackson 1995), interventions by the "Concert of Europe" in the Ottoman Empire to protect Christian and Jewish minorities, justified by "humanitarian reasons and the necessity of preventive measures" (Trim/Simms 2011: 19), and by "liberty", "civilisation", "humanity/human rights" (Trim/Simms 2011: 21, 24), became a recurrent behavioral pattern. "Human rights" emerged as a political term and legal concept (Trim/Simms 2011: 22), and a "humanitarian public" and "humanitarian lobby" in Europe was gradually established (Trim/Simms 2011: 22).

As a case in point, The Holy Alliance (Prussia, Russia, Habsburg-Austria) did intervene several times in Greece between 1822 and 1830 with the declared aim to protect the Greek Christian population against slavery, displacement and ethnic cleansing by troops of the Ottoman Empire and Egypt on the island of Chios and other places in the Aegean. Thus, the Holy Alliance managed to appear as the "humanitarian" protector of Greece, even though Russia in particular was quite obviously interested in balancing the power of the Ottoman Empire. Two other examples for non-democratic humanitarian interventions are military actions by France under the House of Bourbon in Lebanon and Syria 1860/61, allegedly to protect Christian Maronits against violent Muslim and Druze communities (Rodogno 2011; Finnemore 2003: 60-62), and Russia's intervention against the Ottoman Empire in Bosnia between 1875 and 1877 to protect the Orthodox Christian population (Heraclides/Dialla 2015b; Schulz 2011).

Humanitarian interventions during the Cold War

Also during the Cold War, non-Western humanitarian interventions did occur, even though very rarely. Democratic India pretended to intervene in East-Pakistan to save civilians from the military campaign of West Pakistani troops (Franck/Rodley 1973). Vietnam claimed to intervene in Kampuchea (today's Cambodia) in 1978/79 to protect the Vietnamese population in the border areas as well as the Cambodian population against terror and genocide committed by dictator Pol Pot and his totalitarian regime. When Vietnamese troops arrived in the capital Phnom Penh, more than 1,8 Million people had been killed by the troops of the Khmer Rouge in the ”Killing Fields”. Vietnam did refer to humanitarian principles in addition to the U.N. Charter and its right of self-defense (according to Article 51). Yet although there is no doubt that Vietnam's intervention stopped genocide and prevented further atrocities (Trim/Simms 2011: 17), the Vietnamese government faced accusation by the US and other Western states that is was driven by geopolitical and strategic interests of expansionism and regional hegemony (Quinn-Judge 2011: 343; Wheeler 2000b; Denduangrudee 2011: 159). A very interesting but almost unknown case of humanitarian intervention in Africa is Tanzania's intervention in Uganda 1978/79 against the terror-regime of Dictator Idi Amin that was responsible for mass atrocities and the killing of more than 300.000 people. Like in the Vietnamese case, Tanzania was accused to pursue strategic interests of regional hegemony in East-Africa rather than to follow humanitarian principles (Teson 2005b; Wheeler 2000c). A final possible candidate for authoritarian humanitarian interventionism during the Cold War is Syria, whose military engagement in Lebanon since 1975 has been justified as a response to pleas for assistance from Muslim communities within the neighboring country (Castellino 2011).

Humanitarian “liberal interventions” since the 1990s

> “Global interdependence requires global values commonly or evenly applied.
> But sometimes force is necessary to get the space
> for those values to be applied”
> (Tony Blair, Speech in the George Bush Sr. Presidential Library, 7 April 2002)[1]

The second “high noon of intervention” was the era between 1990 and 2003, a period marked by *“liberal interventionism”* according to critical IR scholars (Desch 2007; Jamison 2011; Tezon 2005a):

> The R2P was born in an era when assertive liberalism was at its height, and sovereign equality

1 Cited according to Jamison 2011: 371.

> looked and smelled reactionary. But as the liberal moment recedes, and the distribution of power shifts globally, the principle of sovereign equality may enjoy a comeback. (Jennifer Welsh, cited from Morris 2013: 1279).

After the end of the Cold War, a series of ethnic conflicts did erupt, leading to violence, mass atrocities and civil wars between different ethnic or religious groups within rupturing or failing states (Brock/Holm/Sörensen/Stohl 2011). The wars in Yugoslavia between 1991 and 2001, or the tragedy of Somalia are only two instances of what Kaldor (1999) labeled *New Wars*. It was also the time of separation- and irredentism-movements in Yugoslavia (the Bosnian Serbs tried to enlarge their territory, and to tie Serbian Bosnia/Banja Luka to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia/Belgrad) and in the Caucasus region (the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan because of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh). Also the conflicts in Somalia (1992), Haiti (1994), Iraq (1990-2003), Ruanda (1994), Sierra Leone (1998), Kongo (1996-1998) and Kosovo (1999), leading to numerous war crimes, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and genocide suggested the need for humanitarian interventions of capable, that is Western, outside forces. And, impressed by the spirit of "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1992), it was indeed primarily Western states who defined a particular and new understanding of *human rights protection*, *human security*, and *sovereignty* (Brock 2005; Liebetanz/Staack 2015).

The self-image of Western states was that they had not only a mission and right, but a duty to protect and spread human rights and democracy. This aspiration was most visibly expressed in the 2000 Blair Doctrine of "The International Community" and a "Western Liberal Values Program" (Wheeler/Owen 2007). Such claims, of course, were never unanimously supported and occasionally faced strong criticism by non-Western powers. But many cases of U.N. mandated interventions by Western powers in failed states and civil wars testify that there was at least some willingness to acquiesce into a liberal international also on the part of non-Western and even authoritarian powers. This 'permissive consensus' began to wither with NATO's Kosovo intervention in 1999. The unilateral application of force in this case as well as other circumstances led to accusations that this intervention was meant as a test of the alliance's Strategic Concept rather than being an effort to protect Albanian civilians (Kuhrt 2014). Great Britain's intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000 and the U.S. Invasion in Iraq 2003 were also discredited as Western hegemonic projects that used the protection of people in Darfur and Syria only as a cover for profit aims and strategic interests. In other words: The linkage between strategic and humanitarian reasoning more and more became obvious and, according to critics, a defining element of Western liberal interventionism (Jamison 2011; Monten 2005).

A dangerous duty: Protecting minorities under the R2P umbrella

In this paper, we argue that the problem with humanitarian interventions and the R2P is not only that many actors within the Global South perceive both as old wine in new bottles, and still as a Western liberal project, and mistrust Western reasoning for interventions (Thakur 2006b). The problem rather is that *both*, Western and non-Western states, can misuse humanitarian interventions and the R2P for their own geopolitical or irredentist agenda (Mouritzen/Wivel 2012). This happens against the background of an eroding U.N. prerogative when it comes to legitimate violence. Recall that the aim of the U.N. is to prevent all kinds of *individual* use of force and violence, and that there are just two exceptions from this: collective measures by the international community with a mandate from the Security Council (SC) according to Chapter VII in order to restore peace and security in international affairs (Article 39-42), and self-defense (Article 51), including self-defense with the help of foreign governments. Many IR scholars discuss the problem of cases when the UN Security Council is blocked because of the veto of at least one of its five permanent member states (P5), and intervening state(s) therefore chose to act without a U.N. mandate but with references to allegedly 'higher' moral reasons, that is to prevent or end human suffering, mass atrocities, or genocide (Teson 2005a). According to Brock, there is a gap between the ongoing differentiation and codification of human rights on the one hand, and stagnating U.N. procedures on the other. As a consequence, a *norm conflict* between using force as ultima ratio to protect human rights *versus* not using force in order to act in line with the U.N. Charter (Wheeler 2000a) emerges in many cases. The very plausibility of this norm conflict opens the possibility of systematic norm abuses when states repeatedly pretend to violate one norm (not using force) in order to implement the other (human rights protection). The protection of human rights thereby risks to become a kind of legitimization (*Ermächtigungsnorm*) for the *unilateral* use of force by individual states (a Coalition of the Willing) without U.N. mandate (see Brock 2005).

There is something almost unavoidable about this dilemma as numerous interventions can be justified by humanitarian reasoning because of political ambiguities that make it almost impossible to disentangle strategic opportunities from moral necessities. As Trim (2011: 400/401) concludes:

> Not only do national security and humanitarian concerns often go hand-in-hand. Motives behind humanitarian interventions are almost invariably mixed. In sum, […] the perceived dichotomy between *Realpolitik* and humanitarian concerns has frequently been a false one. Statesmen have rarely had to choose between acting ethically or morally, to promote human rights, and acting sensibly, in the national interest. Very often these are the same option – more, sometimes one is not possible without the other.

What strikes is the fact that in the IR literature on the R2P, the problem of norm abuse (which also implies cases of non-intervention when conditions would require to take actions) is treated in a rather non-systematic fashion. While problematic interventions of Western states (Kosovo 1999, Iraq 2003, Syria) are discussed exhaustively, non-western military engagements have received scant attention. One reason for this focus on Western interventionism simply might be that after 1990 and up until 2008 military interventions were rarely conducted by non-NATO member states. Another reason might be the above-mentioned supposed *Western democracy-R2P-nexus*. But, as Trim and Simms (2011: 23) conclude in view of India's intervention in East Pakistan/Bangladesh, Vietnam in Cambodia and Tanzania in Uganda: "By the late 20th century, the concept of humanitarian intervention was no longer a solely 'Western' one". Against the commonly shared expectations in IR that the increased weight of "non-Western" powers would lead to the demise of humanitarian norms, the concern for atrocity prevention has become universal, and also the Non-western democratic and authoritarian states from the Global South argue with a duty to protect human, minority and religious rights.

Given the reemergence of sectarian ideologies particularly in the Middle East, it would of course be difficult to argue against the necessity of any kind of minority protection. Remembering the destiny of Jews in Europe, Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Syria after 1990, or Muslims in Bosnia, some authors like De Varennes (2013) demand that the protection of minorities should indeed become the priority of R2P implementation and institutionalization (De Varennes 2013: 222/223). We argue that this could be a dangerous duty, because also states who *pretend* to protect "*their"* minorities would be beneficiary of ill-designed policies in this regard. Most important, the concept of minority and its relationship to external powers is crucial. As the case studies should demonstrate (see part IV. of the paper), *protecting their own ethnic and religious minorities* seems to be a new pattern of legitimization used by authoritarian states in order to justify military violence. In the next step, we want to theorize about this new authoritarian interventionism, and show, amongst other things, that there exist a peculiar relationship between minority protection and authoritarian rule.

III. Towards a *New Authoritarian Interventionism*?

The aim of our paper is not to demonstrate a particular inclination of authoritarian states to humanitarian interventions. Rather we question standard accounts in IR literature of why authoritarian states would not support coercive humanitarianism in principle. We do so by focusing on newer evidence of cases when authoritarian states actually invoked humanitarian reasons as justification for military interventions in other countries. These instances are counterintuitive and they defy those who subsume humanitarian interventions under a so-called Liberal Peace, a formula

for reducing inter- and intrastate violence that rests on the spread of liberal democratic values and market forces (Santos Pereira 2011; Kersten 2011; Chandler 2004). That regime type matters also seems to be at least a tacit assumption in many specific works on the global diffusion and acceptance of the responsibility to protect (see above). More specifically, authoritarian countries – on average – should be more worried about conditional understandings of sovereignty and about granting the international community a right to interference in domestic crises. In fact, the most uncompromising opposition against the R2P came from countries such as Cuba, Iran, Belarus and North Korea. The same kind of countries also tended to issue the strongest defenses of traditional notions of sovereignty and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs.

On closer inspection however, the empirical record is much more ambivalent: Not only that authoritarian states eventually endorsed the R2P at the 2005 U.N. World Summit, and supported the 2009 report of the U.N. Secretary General in the GA. We also observe that since 1990, China, in its responsibility as a U.N. SC permanent member, has authorized a considerable number of coercive measures against other states under U.N. Chapter VII (Cheng/Huangao 2011; Wu 2010; Chen 2009). Humanitarian crisis situations figured prominently in the respective U.N. SC resolutions, and they were characterized as threats to international peace and security, requiring international interference, by all U.N. SC members. While the behavior of authoritarian states within the U.N. might still be explained by institutional constraints and negotiation dynamics as well as by some limited socializing effects, unilateral invocations of the R2P and other sovereignty-encroaching humanitarian norms by authoritarian powers would be more difficult to reconcile with conventional liberal readings of norm diffusion processes. Later we will analyze in more detail Russia's justifications for unilateral military campaigns in Georgia, and the Ukraine In both cases, military actions were framed as humanitarian necessity despite the risk of setting precedents and contributing to changes in customary law.

Against the backdrop of these observations, we might ask ourselves what exactly made us think in the first place that non-democratic states should be less inclined to the rhetorical support and coercive application of the R2P? Put differently, why should democratic states feel more comfortable with R2P than non-democratic states? And why should they be less afraid of the use or misuse of the R2P by others? In the following paragraphs we point to a number of empirical and conceptual arguments in this regard. Each of them appears quite plausible in the beginning. But each runs into difficulties once we take into account its wider implications and consider additional evidence:

First, it is undeniable that democratic states more often than non-democratic states have come out in support of the R2P on various occasions. Regime type thus, seems to have considerable predictive

power when it comes to categorizing norm-entrepreneurs, R2P-advocates, etc. Yet simple correlations of democratic regime type and support of R2P omit two crucial variables, i.e. structural power and the experience of colonial rule. If democracy is positively associated with more extensive trade relationships, higher gross domestic products and bigger defense budgets, neo-realists would not be surprised to see democratic states less concerned about new ways to legitimize military interventions. For they can be quite sure they will not end up at the receiving side of such actions. Perhaps more telling, many societies that suffered from colonial rule fear any encroachment of their sovereignty, no matter for what reason. They are deeply concerned about attempts to qualify the principle of sovereign equality in the name of "good governance", "human rights" or "humanitarian help". Respective policy agendas are accused of being just a cover for the re-establishment of imperial 'standards of civilization" and, hence, a new hierarchical international order (Mallavarapu 2015). Most importantly, both authoritarian and democratic postcolonial societies have made these accusations. India is a prime example of the latter category (Hansel/Möller 2015). The simple fact that there are more authoritarian than democratic postcolonial societies clouds the possibility that it might not be authoritarianism, but historical memory what causes suspicion via-á-vis humanitarian agendas, including the R2P. Thus, the "cultural politics of R2P" (O'Hagan 2015: 291) needs to be taken seriously.

Second, it is true that many authoritarian countries with respect to international human rights regimes oftentimes obstruct the practical implementation of procedures and norms. If there is thus a consistent behavioral pattern across a whole regime complex, we might find it hard to believe that authoritarian countries would deviate from that pattern in the case of the R2P. However, this misses important differences: While human rights regimes potentially interfere with the day-to-day ruling techniques of authoritarianism, for example the surveillance or imprisonment of political dissidents, the R2P only applies to cases of extreme and massive human rights abuses. Since the R2P is only applicable to extraordinary situations, supporting the R2P does not create the same problems of non-compliance as in the case of human rights commitments. What is more, authoritarian countries, despite general skepticism towards international human rights policies, occasionally also exploited potential human rights violations by Western democracies, for example when Russia offered asylum to Edward Snowden. Arab criticism of Israeli policies in the West Bank also comes to mind. If authoritarian countries did not shy away from exploiting potential human rights violations of Western democracies in these cases, thereby implicitly reconfirming the universal applicability of human rights regimes, why then should they refrain from using the R2P as a similar tool to weaken the credibility of democratic rivals and their allies?

Third, one might reply that even though the R2P covers only a spectrum of gross human rights

violations, none of them arguably being included in the standard toolbox of political repression in nondemocratic regimes, authoritarian countries still face a higher probability than nondemocratic regimes of creating circumstances where the threshold of genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity has been crossed. Put differently, authoritarianism structurally increases the probability of large-scale human rights violations. A corollary would be that authoritarian rulers, all things being equal, should be more hesitate to strengthen the R2P than democratic ones. The Achilles heel of this argument is the fact that contemporary scholarship on the causes of genocides is divided about the influence of regime type (Ungor 2015: 41; Strauss 2013: 96-98). Pointing to historical experiences of fascist and communist regimes in the 20th century, some scholars identify high concentrations of political power as an enabling factor of genocidal violence. Democratic checks and balances then appear as antidote to such crimes. Others disagree, emphasizing how democratic competition can foster ethnic segmentation and thus conflict in mixed societies. Still others argue that the probability of genocide is highest during the transition from one form of governance to another. In this view, changing political opportunity structures rather than regime type explains the onset of genocidal violence. More recent cases of genocides and ethnic corroborate the latter argument. Both in the Balkans and in Ruanda, the regimes that committed genocide were in the midst of democratic transitions and made ethno-nationalist claims in the name of majoritarian rule (Strauss 2013: 98).

A fourth line of reasoning is less occupied with regime-type specific risks but focuses on possible benefits and mutually reinforcing variables. Some of these benefits primarily or exclusively apply to democratic states. For example, according to rationalistic theoretical considerations, humanitarian norms could facilitate diversionary actions, i.e. efforts to escape public scrutiny just like in the famous movie ‘Wag the Dog’. From a constructivist perspective, humanitarian interventions are one avenue for externalizing liberal-democratic domestic political norms and for enacting a socially constructed liberal identity. Yet the R2P arguably offers equal benefits to authoritarian political systems and rulers as well: Not by neutralizing accountability procedures nor by externalizing political values. Rather the very legitimacy needs of autocratic rule might actually be well served by the R2P. Authoritarian rule, to begin with, lacks input-legitimacy and, thus, necessitates output legitimacy: Economic welfare and security. Moreover, and with regard to the latter, the suspension of democratic procedures and rights is usually justified by the need of responding to a security crisis. Egypt post-2011 is a telling example. Authoritarian structures and policies therefore need to appear as the better of two evils during times of existential threats, otherwise they cease to be justifiable.

Now recall that at the bottom of the human security paradigm as well as the R2P is utilitarian or

consequentialist logic as well: People should live free from fear and want, they should be safe from major threats to their lives. Only to make sure that these basic rights can be guaranteed, the violation and suspension of the principle of sovereign equality is deemed justifiable. In other words: The applicability of the R2P in particular rests on the definition of exceptional circumstances. It is therefore not far-fetched to associate the invocation of R2P with securitizing moves. These could be very similar to the framing and story-telling of authoritarian legitimization strategies. Given that many authoritarian regimes have revisionist aims and play irredentist cards, pointing to existential threats in the neighborhood and invoking the R2P in order to justify interventions could be very helpful to legitimize the extension of authoritarian rule across borders. As we will show in the next part of the paper, the establishment of non-democratic Russian puppet-regimes in South-Ossetia and in East Ukraine illustrates this point very well.

IV. Case Studies

We can identify at least three cases of authoritarian interventionism in the name of human rights and the protection of civilians: Russia's intervention in Georgia (2008) and the Ukraine (2014), and Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen (2015).

"Protecting Russians" – Russia, Humanitarian Intervention, and the R2P reloaded

Russia and the R2P is a very peculiar case. At first glance, one might think that Russia is an opponent of the R2P, because in the 1990s, it was a reliable opponent of the humanitarian interventions of the West in the "internal affairs" of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (Kuhrt 2014). But, at second glance, Russia's R2P policy is much more ambivalent. Between 2001 and 2005, Russia did neither oppose the core idea of the responsibility to protect, nor proceedings and establishment of the R2P within U.N., nor has it avoided to referring to the R2P since its institutionalization after the World Summit (Loges 2013). Quite contrary, the Russian government and Moscow's diplomats played an active part in the debates on the R2P, and they were successful in introducing a particular *old* understanding of the R2P as *minority protection by regional and great powers*.

The Russian position essentially boils down to an irredentist version of conditional understandings of sovereignty. Yet in contrast to Western powers, these aberrations from absolute understandings of sovereignty are not always overtly displayed. Thus, Russia (like China) keeps presenting themselves as a legalistic and pluralistic (Jackson 1995) advocate and guardian of Westphalian notions of sovereignty and territorial integrity. According to Russian (and Chinese) diplomats, the responsibility to protect civilians lies primarily with the governments of the countries

(plural!) concerned, and individual states and national governments (and not the U.N. collectively) are the key players in R2P affairs:

> We favour the interpretation of the concept of the responsibility to protect in accordance with the final document of the 2005 summit (GA resolution 60/1), as a *responsibility of each State to protect those individuals under its jurisdiction* – protection from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Moreover, it is the United Nations and the Security Council that bear the task of supporting those *national efforts*. (Russian Statement to the R2P, 27. May 2008, S/PV. 5998: 16, cited according to Loges 2013: 313, *accentuation by A.R./M.H.*)

At the same time however, the Russian government it is eager to stress the quasi-executive functions of the SC and the veto position of the P5 (Kuhrt 2014; Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2008). As one of the P5, Russia sees itself as a great power responsible for peace, security and stability in its shared neighborhood (the Ukraine, Georgia, Moldavia, Belarus, the Caucasus, and the Baltic States) (Mouritzen/Wivel 2012c; Romanova/Pavlova 2012). Therefore, Russia is avoiding (and opposing) any development that could minimize its power and influence within the U.N., and its voice opportunity *over* the R2P and its definition, implementation and application (*Gestaltungsmacht*). Moreover, Russia is avoiding (and opposing) any politics that could limit its latitude and freedom of action. This is why Moscow is very sceptical concerning any institutionalized and binding character of the norm, any obligatory commitment to intervene in *ex ante* defined cases. Quite contrary, Russia underlines the fact that every single conflict has its own specifics, and therefore must be evaluated separately in a given historical/political context.

More important though, the commitment to sovereign equality and territorial integrity is not only constrained by great power responsibilities, but also by the existence of transnational cultural and ethnic ties. Thus, former President Dmitri Medvedev, already in 2006, warned that

> Protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be, is an unquestionable foreign policy priority of our country […]. It should be clear to all that we will respond to any aggressive acts committed against us (quoted in Shapovalova 2011: 170).

Putting words into action, three years after the World Summit, Russia did intervene in Georgia in 2008, and in the Ukraine in 2014. In 2008, Russian troops supported the pro-Russian militas in South-Ossetia and Abkhazia, which both had been autonomous republics within the territory of Georgia and which both are now de facto states,. The intervention was justified by the government in terms of peace-keeping and humanitarian reasons, namely to "protect suffering Russian civilians"

(Medvedev 2008). This paper is not the place to reconstruct the war, and to speculate about the Georgian and Russia's true motives (see Kuhrt 2014; Mouritzen/Wivel 2012a, b, c, d). What is of higher importance is the government's justification for the war as a necessary intervention to end "a genocide against South Ossetians and to protect Russian civilians" (Kuhrt 2014). Clearly, the language used by the Russian government and Russian diplomats was resembled Western arguments to justify the bombing of Serbia in 1999. Even more striking, Russia explicitly cited the Kosovo precedent as reason why the recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008 was legitimate (Allison 2008; Kuhrt 2014).

In the case of Russian's intervention in and its annexation of the Crimea in February and March 2014, Russia's President Vladimir Putin also referred to the Kosovo case in a twofold manner: According to the Kremlin, the intervention of Russian troops in the territory of the Ukraine was necessary to "prevent genocide against Russian people". Russia invoked *its* idea about the core of the R2P, namely preventive humanitarian intervention in order to protect Russian minorities and citizens from discrimination, crimes and punishment, and death:

> If we see such uncontrolled crime spreading to the eastern regions of the country [Ukraine], and if the people ask us for help, while we already have the official request from the legitimate president, we retain the right to use all available means to protect those people […] with whom we have close historical, cultural and economic ties (President Vladimir Putin, quoted in Coicaud 2015: 173-174).

Moscow underlined the necessity and right of secession and independence of the Crimea from the Ukraine with regard to Kosovo's separation from Serbia in 2007 (Kuhrt 2014). Defending the absorption of the Crimean in his Address to the State Duma in March 2014, Putin explained:

> Moreover, the Crimean authorities referred to the well-known Kosovo precedent – a precedent our Western colleagues created with their own hands in a very similar situation, when they agreed that the unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia, exactly what Crimea is now doing, was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country's central authorities (Vladimir Putin, quoted in Coicaud 2015: 174).

To sum up: Russia uses a humanitarian language, referring indirectly to the R2P and directly to the Kosovo precedent, in order to justify military interventions abroad (which can also be seen as an instrument for a policy of irredentism). Russia's expropriation of the R2P language and idea can be interpreted as a way in which Russia hold up a mirror to the Western humanitarian interventionism. But, it can also be interpreted as an new interest-driven authoritarian interventionism in

humanitarian robe.

“To protect people and government” - Saudi-Arabia's intervention in Yemen

Many of the destabilizing events and violent crises in the Middle East – the conflict about Iran's nuclear weapons, the never ending Syria civil war, the rise of the 'Islamic State', state failure and violent factions in Yemen – have been explained partly as the result of the strategic competition between antagonistic regional powers, namely Saudi-Arabia and Iran. This is not to say that both powers resort to the same kind of strategies. At least two differences stand out: While Iran builds up and exploits political alliances with various state and non-state actors, provides weapons and financial resources, Saudi-Arabia does not solely use proxies but at least in two cases intervened directly in other countries, both times without a U.N. mandate (Bahrain 2011 and Yemen since 2015). Another difference has yet to capture scholary attention: While Iran keeps issuing deep reservations if not outright hostile rhetoric vis-á-vis the R2P[2], Saudi-Arabia apparently shifted to a proactive rhetorical endorsement of the norm in order to justify its policies towards Yemen:

Thus, in April 2015, Brigadier General Ahmad Al-Assiri, spokesman for the Saudi-led Arab coalition coordinating airstrikes in Yemen, declared the coalition's intent “to make sure that those [the Houthi] militia do not have capabilities to harm the population”. Alluding to the R2P's notion of subsidiary and complementary responsibilities, he went on to say that “Mansour [the elected Yemenite president] has the responsibility to protect Yemen and the population against these militias, and he called for help” (Los Angeles Times 2015). In a similar vein, Saudi-Arabia's ambassador to the United States, Adel al-Jubeir, told an American TV channel that “this is a war to protect the people of Yemen and defend its legitimate government” (quoted in Tuckwell/Smyth 2015). After the first airborne operation “Decisive Storm” ended on April 25th 2015, a follow-on operation, “Restoring Hope”, was announced and, again, justifies by obvious references to the R2P. Al-Assiri, this time during an interview with Arab News, counted the “protection of civilians” and support of humanitarian relief works as two of three main purposes of Operation Restoring Hope. Also, he included the “safety of citizens” and preventing the Houthi militia from harming civilians as an important operational goal (Arab News 2015).

In sum, the case of Saudi-Arabia and its intervention in Yemen resembles Russian declaratory policies above, although irredentist elements are absent and the issue of kinship (with regard to the Sunnite religious community) and rescuing fellowers are less explicit. Also, it is much more obvious in the case of Saudi-Arabia that the intervention violated the principle of “not doing

2 One notable, but difficult to interprete exception could be Admiral Hossein Azad's claim that Iranian warships had a special responsibility to protect the delivery of humanitarian aid to Yemen (Reuters 2015).bt

more harm than good". In fact, there has been strong opposition in the U.N. and elsewhere to Saudi-Arabia's behavior on the ground that the intervention itself lead to an escalation of the war fighting in Yemen and huge numbers of civilian casualties. Human Rights Watch, for example, characterized at least some Saudi air strikes as being "in apparent violation of international humanitarian law" (quoted in Tuckwell/Smyth 2015). Interestingly, Saudi-Arabia's effort to legitimize its intervention by claiming to implement the R2P did therefore not primarily fail because of its poor human rights record at home and resultant accusations of hypocrisy, but because operational decisions of the Saudi armed forces seemed to reveal a certain disregard for the suffering of the civilian population. This notwithstanding, there might be a paradigm shift underway. Prior to Saudi-Arabia's affirmative use of the R2P, Arab states advocated its use only in the framework of U.N.-mandated actions, as for example in case of Libya 2011 (bin Talal/Schwarz 2013, 8-9), and occasionally on behalf of the Palestinian people. Now the Saudi-led intervention, although implemented multilaterally and formally invited by the Yemen government, crossed the Rubicon towards marginalizing the U.N. and implementing the R2P through 'coalitions of the willing'.

V. Conclusion: The Road Ahead

In concluding, we point out possible implications of the new trend of authoritarian humanitarian interventionism in terms of norm development and diffusion and raise several open questions that future studies of the phenomenon might address. As regards implications, three different scenarios might be discussed:

The first, 'liberal-optimist', would be that authoritarian countries, by adopting a humanitarian language for whatever reasons, implicitly reaffirmed the universal acceptance of the R2P and thus contributed to raising its status to customary international law. While their pursued irredentist and revisionist policies failed to get international conundrum, authoritarian countries have fallen into a liberal trap and they will have a hard time rolling back their explicit commitment to the R2P in the future. In sum, what counts in the long run is not the strategic calculus behind authoritarian interventionism, but it unintended consequences, eventually equaling a self-entrapment of authoritarian powers.

A second scenario conversely takes seriously the hollowing out of the substantial and procedural qualities of the R2P as a result of unilateral interventions and the use of disproportionate force for questionable purposes. As a result, it assumes a lasting damage in terms of the specificity and guiding character of the R2P, which will be so watered down that international commitments to the R2P will almost have no consequences anymore and the international community will face the status quo ante. In fact, this radical voluntarism is exactly what the Russian R2P discourse might be intended to demonstrate and, thus, to promote, according to Burtai (2016). The resulting scenario

seems like the realist-pessimist counterpart to the liberal-optimist variant above.

Finally, a third scenario refuses to assume a linear progressive norm life cycle or diffusion process and instead reckons with the possibility that even obvious norm abuses, such as the US-intervention in Iraq 2003, through intensified norm contestation have the potential to clarify the meaning and scope conditions of international norms (Badescu/Weiss 2010). For example, Russia's appropriation of the R2P for irredentist purposes may provoke an intensified transnational and international debate of the "problem of the kin-state" (Kemp/Popovski/Thakurn 2011). While the outcome of this debate, i.e. under what circumstances ethnic or religious communities have legitimate rights to protect outside members, cannot be predicted, ambiguities will likely be reduced and thus the specificity of the norm increased – for better or worse.

Linked to these scenarios is a range of open questions that more directly address specific regime-type effects. Most importantly, more research is needed on the effectiveness of authoritarian legitimization strategies with regard to the R2P: While we were able to show that Russia and Saudi-Arabia deliberately alluded to a humanitarian rhetoric, this does not mean that they succeeded in convincing relevant third parties. Future studies could therefore shed light on the perception of such legitimization strategies by different audiences, both domestically and at the international and transnational level. It might also be worth to explore in more detail *specific* effectiveness conditions and constraints of authoritarian legitimization strategies. For instance, is the humanitarian rhetoric brought forward by intervening autocracies less credible because of their poor human rights records and political repression at home? Or are there separate discourses, one focused on the legitimacy of cross-border violence and another on the authoritarian character of the Russian or Saudi-Arabian political systems? Finally, there is also a normative dilemma: Is it possible to discredit the irredentist use of the R2P by non-Western authoritarian powers without at the same time denying the universalist aspirations of the norm? On the one hand, interventions which invoke humanitarian principles to protect nationals abroad or members of an affiliated religious community call into question the altruistic and cosmopolitan concept of „saving strangers" (Wheeler 2000a). Thus, they must arguably be met with considerable scepticism. Criticizing these uses, on the other hand, risks reinforcing the claim that the R2P is only a vehicle for self-mandated Western interventionism. This delicate relationship between universal and particularist notions makes it all the more necessary to rethink responsibility in light of authoritarian humanitarian interventions.

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