Introduction:
A Personal Journey

For me the journey, emotionally and intellectually, began in Cambodia in 1968. I was a young Australian making my first trip to Europe, to take up a scholarship in Oxford. Inexhaustibly hungry for experience, like so many of my compatriots before and since, I spent six months wending my way by plane and overland through a dozen countries in Asia, and a few more in Africa and the Middle East as well. And in every one of them, I spent many hours and days on student campuses and in student hangouts, and in hard-class cross-country trains and ramshackle rural buses, getting to know in the process—usually fleetingly but quite often enduringly, in friendships that have lasted to this day—scores of some of the liveliest and brightest people of their generation.

In the years that followed, I have often come across Indonesians, Singaporeans, Malaysians, Thais, Vietnamese, Indians, Pakistanis, and others that I either met on the road on that trip, or who were there at the time and had a store of common experiences to exchange. But among all the countries in Asia I visited then, there is just one, Cambodia, from which I never again, in later years, saw *any* of those students whom I had met and befriended, or anyone exactly like them—not one of those kids with whom I drank beer, ate noodles, and careered up and down the dusty road from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap in child-, chicken-, and pig-scattering share taxis.

The reason, I am sadly certain, is that every last one of them died a few years later under Pol Pot's murderous genocidal regime—either targeted

for execution in the killing fields as a middle-class intellectual enemy of the state or dying, as more than a million did, from starvation and disease after forced displacement to labor in the countryside. The knowledge, and the memory, of what must have happened to those young men and women is something that haunts me to this day.

That memory certainly was a core motivation during the long and grueling years in the late 1980s and early 1990s that I worked as Australian Foreign Minister, along with my Southeast Asian, Chinese, American, and UN colleagues, to find and implement a sustainable basis for peace in Cambodia. It was a recurring motif as I watched, impotently and from a distance, the tragic events in Central Africa and the Balkans work themselves out through the mid- to late 1990s.

And it was what made me accept with alacrity the offer of the Canadian government in 2000 to jointly lead a distinguished international commission charged with the task of trying to find, once and for all, a conceptual and practical answer that would unite, rather than continuing to divide, the international community in preventing and responding to mass atrocity crimes. The answer we came to—the concept of "the responsibility to protect"—is what this book is about.

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Few contemporary events have seared the consciences of so many around the globe as much as two events just a year apart in the mid-1990s. In Rwanda in 1994, 800,000 men, women, and children were slaughtered over a few short weeks while the world's policymakers found reasons to do absolutely nothing in response. And in Srebrenica in Bosnia in 1995, 8,000 young and old men were massacred within a few days, taken from a UN "safe haven" while the troops deployed to protect them stood and watched.

How could we have said "never again" with so much conviction and confidence after the Holocaust of the Second World War, and then again after the revelation of the horror of Cambodia, when up to two million died in four years of tyrannical Khmer Rouge rule from 1975 to 1979? Now here we were, less than twenty years later, with the Genocide Convention in place and with all our accumulated historical experience, saying it again—and again. How, we asked ourselves with varying degrees of incomprehension, horror, anger, and shame, could we possibly have let this all happen again?

This book is about the way in which the world has at last started to answer that question and to take the steps necessary to ensure that we will never again have to say "never again." The decade of the 1990s was the watershed; the report of the International Commission on State Sovereignty in 2001, coming up with the new concept of "the responsibility to protect," was the immediate catalyst; and the unanimous decision by the World Summit in 2005 to embrace the concept was the crucial formal endorsement. As the chapters that follow make clear, much remains to be done to bed down this new international norm and ensure its effective practical application, but we are on our way, and none too soon. Part I is about understanding the responsibility to protect, how the concept emerged, and what it does and does not embrace, while Part II is about what is necessary to operationalize the new norm, to make it work effectively in practice.

The 1990s saw not only the catastrophes of Rwanda and Srebrenica but also the debacle of the attempted intervention in Somalia in 1993 and the inability of the UN Security Council to agree on a response to the killing and ethnic cleansing that broke out in Kosovo in 1999. There were other cases—northern Iraq, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste—where the performance was a little better. But the enduring memory of the decade is hesitation and incapacity to act, or act quickly and effectively enough, in case after case where civilian lives were massively at risk—and of an endemic lack of consensus among decisionmakers as to what was the right thing to do.

Throughout the decade, a fierce argument raged between, on the one hand, advocates of "humanitarian intervention"—the doctrine that there was a "right to intervene" militarily in these cases, against the will of the government of the country in question—and, on the other hand, defenders of the traditional prerogatives of state sovereignty, who insisted that internal events were none of the rest of the world's business. There was ample room, conceptually, to find common ground between these extremes, but no one seemed able to locate or articulate it: the verbal trench warfare, in the UN General Assembly and elsewhere, became ever more intense, and the inability to agree on an appropriate response to each of these situations as they arose became ever more frustrating and damaging.

The breakthrough came with the emergence in 2001 of the concept of the responsibility to protect and its subsequent unanimous embrace by

the General Assembly, meeting at head of state and government level, in 2005. This turned "right to intervene" language on its head, focusing not on any rights of the great and powerful to throw their weight around but rather on the responsibility of all states to meet the needs of the utterly powerless. In the first instance, the responsibility to protect a country's people from mass atrocity crimes lay with its own government; but if it proved unable or unwilling to do so, a wider responsibility lay with other members of the international community to assist preventively and, if necessary, react effectively. Military intervention—the centerpiece of the earlier argument about "the right of humanitarian intervention"—remained an option in extreme cases, but only as a last resort and if the Security Council agreed. "The responsibility to protect" was about much more: the responsibility to prevent before a crisis and to rebuild after it, as well as to react during it, and in all cases, with the emphasis on nonmilitary action.

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Just like in the past when Columbus in 1492 and Vasco da Gama in 1498 came with the Bible and the sword, the likes of Gareth Evans now come in 2007 with R2P.
—Lankaweb, Colombo, October 17, 2007[1]

My own direct role in the emergence of the new international norm was as cochair—with my distinguished Algerian colleague Mohamed Sahnoun—of the Canadian government–sponsored International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), which first articulated the concept in its 2001 report entitled *The Responsibility to Protect*. The commission was an extraordinarily lively group of very able and strong-willed personalities, and although our yearlong consultations and deliberations across four continents were conducted with great good humor throughout, it was something of a miracle that Mohamed and I were able to extract from our colleagues a final report that had in it not a single line of recorded dissent. Along the way, though, everything was contestable—and contested.

Congressman Lee Hamilton, I hope he won't be unhappy to recall, was the very last to join the consensus, in the last hour of our last meeting. His "Alamo" issue was the exceedingly difficult one—not least for a very public U.S. figure acutely attuned to the public mood of the time—of whether coalitions of the willing should be able to bypass the Security Council if a veto blocked action that most of the world thought appropriate and defen-

sible. Our colleagues thought the two former politicians among us should fight it out in a private back room, and the extended arm wrestle Lee and I had to find a formula with which we each could live left us both a little misty eyed for our previous careers. All that was missing was the smoke.

The name of the report and its sustaining theme was no exception to the contestability rule. At the first of the commission's five meetings, in Ottawa in November 2000, I remember suggesting that what we needed was a strong new phrase: one that would capture the flavor of what we probably all wanted to say about the moral imperative of responding to atrocity crimes, be succinct and memorable, and, while having some continuity with the debate of which we had all been part over the last decade, also mark an escape from its sterility and divisiveness. So far, so good. But then—having spent a few mornings under the shower in the lead-up to our meeting toying with a score or more of different word combinations—I was adventurous enough to suggest that maybe, just maybe, there was a phrase—"the responsibility to protect"—we could agree met those criteria and perhaps even work as the title of the report. But to suggest the report's title before we had even begun to discuss its content, let alone taken any soundings in the dozen consultations that were scheduled to take place around the world, was considered a little presumptuous, even for an Australian. "Well, we'll have to think long and hard about *that*," was the hardly unreasonable general response. My handwritten notes of that meeting, incidentally, use "RtP" as shorthand for the phrase under discussion; it wasn't until rather later that the generally accepted summary form became "R2P" (no doubt under the universal cultural influence of *Star Wars* and its engagingly determined little droid R2-D2).

The ICISS report had the misfortune to be published in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy of September 11, and with public and professional foreign policy attention naturally now wholly focused on the issue of international terrorism, the report seemed likely to disappear without a trace. That it did not was partly a function of my serendipitous appointment in 2003 to the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, which was charged with generating input on geopolitical and security issues into the preparations for the 2005 World Summit. With a little help from another wonderful group of fellow panelists drawn from around the world, who proved equally willing—although not without a few bumps along the way—to tolerate my obsession with this

issue, our 2004 report, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, explicitly picked up the ICISS recommendations and urged that the embrace of the responsibility to protect concept be a major Summit objective. However, what mattered even more than the High-Level Panel report in ensuring that the issue came before the World Summit was the willingness of the secretary-general to run with it in his own agenda-setting report, *In Larger Freedom.* If R2P does prove to be an enduring and influential new norm, its success will have many fathers, Kofi Annan very prominent among them.

Since 2001 I have been actively engaged in speaking and writing about the concept in many countries, with many different reactions, not all of them quite as extravagant as the Sri Lankan columnist cited above. A good deal of this advocacy has been as president of the International Crisis Group, whose mission it is to seek to prevent and resolve deadly conflict—including mass atrocity crimes—worldwide. The situations in Darfur, Burundi, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, and Kenya are among those in which Crisis Group is actively involved and where R2P has had prima facie application.

Most recently, Crisis Group joined with a number of other major international nongovernmental organizations—Human Rights Watch, Oxfam International, Refugees International, and the WFM–Institute of Global Policy—to establish, with the financial support of a number of governments, foundations, and individuals, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, a research and advocacy body with a strong North-South character. Its general aim is to ensure that R2P will be effectively implemented in practice, but the immediate focus is on consolidating acceptance of the concept around the world, particularly in those countries and regions where support for the concept has retreated somewhat since the high-water mark of the 2005 World Summit. In this respect, a great deal of work remains to be done by a good number of people who will need to sustain their own enthusiasm for the R2P norm for a good time to come.

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For all of us in the policy world for whom the responsibility to protect concept has been more than just a matter of abstract, intellectual commitment, there has invariably been some personal experience that has touched us deeply. For many that will be bound to be scarifying family memories of the Holocaust; for others the experience of personal loss or closely

knowing survivors from Rwanda or Srebrenica or any of the other mass atrocity scenes of more recent decades; for others still, perhaps, the awful sense that they could have done more, in their past official lives, to generate the kind of international response that these situations required. For me, as I have indicated, it was my visit to Cambodia in the late 1960s, just before the genocidal slaughter that killed up to a quarter of its people.

One of the things that has most sustained me over forty years of public life, more than twenty of them working in international affairs, is a fairly unquenchable sense of optimism: a belief that even the most horrible and intractable problems are soluble; that rational solutions for which there are good, principled arguments do eventually prevail; and that good people, good governments, and good governance will eventually prevail over bad.

When it comes to international relations, and in particular the great issues of war and peace, violence, and catastrophic human rights violations with which we are concerned here, there is a well-established view that anyone who approaches things in this kind of generally optimistic frame of mind must be incorrigibly naïve, if not outright demented. Certainly in the case of genocide and atrocity crimes—either directly committed by a government against its own people, or allowed to happen by a government unable or unwilling to stop it—it is hard for even the incorrigibly naïve to remain optimistic.

In this world we inhabit—full of cynicism, double standards, crude assertions of national interest, high-level realpolitik, and low-level maneuvering for political advantage—it is very easy to believe that ideas do not matter very much. But I believe as passionately now as I ever have in my long career—starting and finishing in the world of nongovernmental organizations, but with much time between in politics and government—that ideas matter enormously, for good and for ill. And for all the difficulties of acceptance and application that lie ahead, there are —I have come optimistically, but firmly, to believe—not many ideas that have the potential to matter more for good, not only in theory but in practice, than that of the responsibility to protect.