

# R2P: Typecasting Canada as Hero in Theatres of War

By Richard Sanders

The so-called “Responsibility-to-Protect” (R2P) doctrine was used as an ideological pretext to justify and legitimize the military invasion, regime change and UN-sanctioned occupation of Haiti.

For this, Canada has a lot to answer for. Canada is widely recognized as “the principal architect and advocate of the ‘responsibility to protect.’”<sup>1</sup> It was, after all, thanks to the Canadian government that this doctrine was institutionalised at the international level by a creature called the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS).

The ICISS was the brain-child of then-Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, who announced its conception in early September 2000.<sup>2</sup> Its birth was formally announced a week later by then-Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy, who thanked the “Carnegie, MacArthur and Rockefeller Foundations” for “strong political and financial support.” Then, without any apparent conscious irony, he said these billionaire-funded organizations “are known for their leadership and vision.”<sup>3</sup>

The Canadian government’s parenting role for the ICISS did not end there. Two of its five meetings were held in Canada,<sup>4</sup> Axworthy chaired its advisory board<sup>5</sup> and its offices were located in Ottawa’s Department of Foreign Affairs’ building.<sup>6</sup> Canada also chose both ICISS co-chairs and helped select its ten commissioners.<sup>7</sup> Canada, represented by Michael Ignatieff and Gisèle Côté-Harper,<sup>8</sup> was the only country with more than one commissioner. (If you count that “Big L” Liberal Ignatieff, the longtime U.S. resident and supporter of George Bush, missile defense, the Iraq war and torture, as a Canadian.)

The R2P doctrine, which Canada so-proudly fostered, directly contradicts the UN’s primary principles of sovereignty and military non-intervention. It spells out excuses for violating



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these longstanding precepts of the UN.

So, why would Canada, a nation widely perceived as a strong UN advocate, spearhead the creation of the ICISS with its R2P agenda? Shouldn’t we have expected the U.S. or Britain—not Canada—to have spawned such an offspring? These, after all, are the state actors which so often use humanitarian excuses to mask their imperial intentions in scattered theatres of war.

In May 2004—soon after Canadian government efforts reached fruition in the brutal regime change that ousted Haiti’s democratically-elected government—then-Prime Minister Paul Martin asked an important question. First, using Made-in-Canada rhetoric he summarized R2P saying: “Failed states more often than not require military intervention in order to ensure stability.”<sup>9</sup> Then, he posed the question: “So why is it up to Canada to be the catalyst?” His answer is telling: “We inspire confidence not only because we are a large industrialized nation, but also because *we are neither a former colonial power nor a superpower.*”<sup>10</sup> (emphasis added)

Can you imagine the snickering if a “superpower” or “former colonial power” had stepped forward as “catalyst” for the R2P opus? Picture the U.S. or Britain leading the global charge to

use respect for peace and democracy as a justification for launching military invasions and regime changes. If Bush or Blair had starred in this drama, the whole production would have been laughed off the global stage as a ridiculous farce.

But Canada was perfect for the part. Our government has carefully crafted the image of a fair and peaceable actor, untainted by roles in imperial war. This guise, of course, flies in the face of reality. Canada’s reputation as the honest broker, unpretentious peacemaker and reluctant warrior, is a convenient false front which is dearly valued by our closest political, economic and military allies.

Others in our troupe were delighted to have Canada take the starring role on R2P. They needed an actor who could invoke just the right image. Canada was the perfect stand-in because for so many seasons it has been typecast as the heroic peacemaker.

But how much longer will Canada be able to play such chivalrous parts? When will fans see through this thinly-veiled disguise? Will global audiences wise up enough to throw tomatoes not roses, when Canada arrogantly bows for applause after a carefully-rehearsed humanitarian war is dutifully performed in service to empire?

## IDEOLOGY

Although peace activists are less susceptible to the deceptive arts of political theatre, we are not immune from their powerful influence. Even well-meaning activists are swayed to support the violent plays of empire if enough noble-sounding soliloquies and emotionally-charged spectacles are heeded. In coming years, anti-war activists will have to be increasingly wary of grandstanding politicians and other thespians whose lines, drawn from the R2P script, are used as cover in economic and military power plays.

By assuming the metaphorical role of theatre critics, activists can perhaps expose the R2P storyboard before the elite's trusty playwrights can reuse it as a template to create future wars.

As independent journalist Derrick O'Keefe has said

"The buzzwords to watch for are 'failed states,' 'responsibility to protect,' and the timeless rationalization of 'humanitarian intervention.' From Afghanistan to Haiti, the high-sounding proclamations of this liberal interventionism are coming to more closely mirror the foreign policy aims outlined by the cowboy neo-conservatives to the south. Maybe Martin's new strident pose will help some lose their illusions in Canadian neutrality and benevolence, specifically with respect to the occupation of Iraq where, as the PM says 'we're certainly doing our share.'"<sup>11</sup>

## References

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9. Anthony Fenton, "From Monroe to Bush to Martin?" *ZNet*, Sept. 22, 2004.
10. Address by Prime Minister Paul Martin, May 10, 2004. <[www.pco.gc.ca](http://www.pco.gc.ca)>
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## Historical Antecedents of Canada's "Responsibility-to-Protect" Doctrine



### The White Man's Burden

This poem, written by Rudyard Kipling in 1899, was used to justify the America's imperialist war for Spanish colonies (like Cuba and the Philippines) as if it were a noble and righteous cause.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
Send forth the best ye breed--  
Go, bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait, in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild--  
Your new-caught sullen peoples,  
Half devil and half child.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
In patience to abide,  
To veil the threat of terror  
And check the show of pride;  
By open speech and simple,  
An hundred times made plain,  
To seek another's profit  
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden--  
The savage wars of peace--  
Fill full the mouth of Famine,  
And bid the sickness cease;  
And when your goal is nearest  
(The end for others sought)  
Watch sloth and heathen folly  
Bring all your hope to nought.



### "Compulsory Government" for "Lower Races"

The 'responsibility to protect' is an official reformalization of imperialism, a new way to state what in 1902 John Hobson described as "trusteeship" to manage the "lower races":

"The real issue is whether, and under what circumstances, it is justifiable for Western nations to use compulsory government for the control and education in the arts of industrial and political civilization of the inhabitants of tropical countries and other so-called lower races."

Hobson was thinking of Haiti when pontificating about efficient and justifiable means to subjugate peoples deemed inferior to the white race:

"If we look to the native social systems of the tropical East, the primitive savagery of Central Africa...or the black republic of Hayti...the lesson seems the same; it is that there will be no development of the resources of the tropics under native government." (Cited in Philip Curtin, *Imperialism*, p. 319-337.)

**Source:** Anthony Fenton, "KLA helps establish 'Protectorate' in Haiti," *Global Research*, Nov. 21, 2004. <[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca)>