

## INTRODUCTION

*In June 2004 the African Union (AU) announced plans to deploy 60 to 80 military observers to monitor a ceasefire agreement in Darfur, Sudan, accompanied by a 300-man protection force. Worldwide, many welcomed this news, especially those who thought the AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) would help to protect civilians.*

*Days before Rwandan troops were to arrive in Darfur in August 2004, a BBC journalist interviewed the Rwandan Foreign Minister Charles Murigande about the mission. “If [troops] come across militias attacking civilians...wouldn’t they have a moral duty to protect the civilians under attack?” the journalist asked.*

*“Yes, they would have a moral duty,” Murigande responded. The journalist pressed, asking if they would protect the civilians and fire on the militia. “I am not sure... Let’s allow them to go there to play out their mission,” Murigande said, given “their mandate.”<sup>1</sup>*

*The mandate for AMIS initially authorized the force to protect only the monitors of the ceasefire—not the Sudanese civilians. By late 2004, however, the AU mandate was expanded to include the protection of civilians whom AMIS forces “encounter under imminent threat and in the immediate vicinity, within resources and capability, it being understood that the protection of the civilian population is the responsibility of the government of Sudan.”<sup>2</sup>*

*This broader language provided little clarity to the AU forces, however. How much protection could a small, fledgling military deployment offer “within resources and capability” in a region the size of France?<sup>3</sup> How could it offer meaningful protection to the population at large when it was instructed to focus only on those “under imminent threat” and “in the immediate vicinity?” A more fundamental challenge for AMIS was that the Government of Sudan (GoS) remained “responsible” for “the protection of the civilian population,” despite the government’s role in aiding and abetting the*

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<sup>1</sup> Rwandan Foreign Minister Charles Murigande, interview with the BBC World Service Newshour News, broadcast over WAMU Radio, 13 August 2004, Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup> AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), Communiqué, PSC/PR/Comm. (XVII), 20 October 2004, para. 2.

<sup>3</sup> AMIS’s authorized force level expanded from an initial deployment of 300 to 7,731 personnel by March 2006.

*ongoing violence. In short, the AU was not supposed to pick a fight with the Sudanese authorities.*

*In light of these difficulties, it is perhaps understandable that the Rwandan Foreign Minister was not “sure” about the role of his nation’s troops in quelling the crisis. His hedge reveals the difficult nature of such military interventions: well-intentioned or not, the deploying troops may not have a clear understanding of how their mission intends to provide, or may be unprepared to provide, physical protection to civilians facing egregious abuses. The crisis in Darfur—in which nearly two million people have been displaced and 400,000 killed—places certain questions for the international community in stark relief: What should be done? What can be done? How, exactly, can military forces best be used to protect civilians from extreme violence?*

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This inquiry builds on the work of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) and its December 2001 report, *The Responsibility to Protect*.<sup>4</sup> The ICISS report sought to square international concern for the victims of egregious violence, such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, and mass killing, with the long-standing norm of non-intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states. The basic argument of the ICISS report was both elegant and groundbreaking: sovereignty, by definition, implies responsibility for the welfare of one’s own citizens.<sup>5</sup> When a state abrogates this responsibility by failing to prevent genocide, ethnic cleansing, or mass killing, the responsibility falls on the international community. The basis for action by the international community, therefore, should not be understood as a “right of humanitarian intervention,” but rather as a “responsibility to protect” civilians facing mass violence.

The Commission report successfully introduced a broad audience to the idea of civilian protection, which has grown in acceptance and parlance in the nearly five years since the report’s publication. Indeed, adoption of the “responsibility to protect” as a framework for intervention is being considered by governments and international organizations, and was met with general endorsement at the United Nations (UN) World Summit in September 2005.

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<sup>4</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, December 2001).

<sup>5</sup> The Commission drew in part upon the work of others who had begun to articulate the notion of “sovereignty as responsibility” throughout the 1990s. Prominent examples include: Francis M. Deng, *Protecting the Dispossessed: A Challenge for the International Community* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993); Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng, *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1998).

The goal of this study is to stimulate discussion on how to “operationalize” the “responsibility to protect” and on how to make UN mandates requiring peacekeepers to “protect civilians” more achievable. If there is, indeed, an international “responsibility to protect,” then identifying *when* this responsibility should be upheld is only part of the question. As this idea moves forward in policy circles, is capacity being developed to keep up? How are military forces preparing to uphold a “responsibility to protect” civilians from mass violence and killing?

## PEACE OPERATIONS AND CIVILIAN PROTECTION

A premise of this study is that a military intervention designed expressly to protect civilians from mass killing is fundamentally different from a peace operation mandated to protect civilians from much lesser risks. Such peace operations typically balance their civilian protection tasks with numerous other goals, such as establishing long-term peace and security. While much in the *Responsibility to Protect* report addresses conflict prevention, peace operations, and peacebuilding efforts, the report’s clear call for intervention in specific cases of mass violence sets such interventions apart from traditional peacekeeping missions.

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Thus, this study distinguishes between missions designed to halt mass killing and peace operations with civilian protection mandates. The former type of mission crosses the sovereignty threshold identified by *The Responsibility to Protect*, where a desire for consent, impartiality, and limited use of force take a back seat to the immediate goal of saving lives. Such missions are unlikely to be led by the United Nations. The latter type of mission exists today in numerous incarnations, including UN operations in Haiti and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the AU operation in Darfur.

The two types of missions are similar, of course—both aim to save lives. Civilian protection, however, has historically been an *implied* goal of a peace operation; the primary goals have usually been political in nature. UN peacekeeping missions traditionally have deployed to support negotiated ceasefires and to prevent a return to interstate warfare, for example. The protection of civilians was thus a likely and important result of such activities rather than their direct or immediate goal. More recently, multidimensional

peace operations have sought to support stability in countries emerging from civil war, so that political reconciliation can take place and governance reform efforts can proceed safely. Even robust “peace enforcement” missions that deploy during ongoing conflict, such as the NATO-led forces and international coalitions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the US-led multinational force in Haiti, have been more about “compelling compliance” with political agreements than protecting people.<sup>6</sup>

Inevitably, the presence of internationally mandated forces in conflict zones has led to calls for their safeguarding civilian lives and supporting humanitarian efforts directly. Such calls often compete with political imperatives, however. While peace operations’ overarching goals have typically related to negotiations, peace agreements, ceasefires between opposing armies, governance, and statecraft, they have never been able to wholly ignore the security and well-being of the populations in their midst. Peace operations have thus straddled a troublesome and sometimes unstable divide between their protection- and political-oriented goals.

*Box 1.1*

#### **WHAT IS PEACEKEEPING?**

Peacekeeping is designed primarily to help support and sustain the end of wars, rather than to intervene directly to save civilian lives. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations’ definition of peacekeeping, for example, demonstrates this approach:

Peacekeeping is a way to help countries torn by conflict create conditions for sustainable peace. UN peacekeepers—soldiers and military officers, police and civilian personnel from many countries—monitor and observe peace processes that emerge in post-conflict situations and assist conflicting parties to implement the peace agreement they have signed. Such assistance comes in many forms, including promoting human security, confidence-building measures, power-sharing arrangements, electoral support, strengthening the rule of law, and economic and social development.

*Source:* UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations website, “Questions and Answers,” 11 July 2006, [www.un.org/depts/dpko/dpko/faq/q1.htm](http://www.un.org/depts/dpko/dpko/faq/q1.htm).

## **THE UNITED NATIONS ROLE**

Beginning in 1999, the UN Security Council began to mention “the protection of civilians” in peacekeeping mandates, making explicit that which had long been

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas G. Weiss, “The Humanitarian Impulse,” in David M. Malone, ed., *The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Boulder: Lynn Rienner, 2004), 46. NATO refers to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

expected of peacekeepers by the public at large. Since then, the Council has regularly referenced the protection of civilians “under imminent threat of physical violence” in mandates for UN-led peace operations authorized under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and used such language in authorizing missions led by other multinational organizations or coalitions.<sup>7</sup>

Despite this new mandate language, the peacekeeper’s job in “protection” is often vague and undefined, particularly in the more challenging, non-permissive environments where mass killing is likely to occur.<sup>8</sup> Just as the international community has provided little guidance on how military forces should implement the “responsibility to protect,” it has also offered little guidance to peacekeepers in violent, unstable regions on the “civilian protection” tasks expected of them.

## COERCIVE PROTECTION OPERATIONS

If peace operations are not primarily designed to protect civilians, a different name is needed for missions that deploy in non-permissive environments with the *immediate goal* of saving civilians who are being killed *en masse*. Certainly, it is possible to imagine such a military intervention that looks very little like “peacekeeping.” Halting violent actors in their tracks might require operations more akin to combat and entail coercion to prevent harm to civilians. Analysts have offered hypothetical intervention forces to combat killers and *génocidaires* in Darfur and Rwanda, for example, involving rapidly deployable, high-tech special operations forces and combat-ready support.<sup>9</sup> While often called humanitarian interventions, the ICISS Panel suggested that such missions be termed “human protection operations,” or “military intervention for human protection purposes.”<sup>10</sup> As discussed later, “coercive protection” is a more apt

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<sup>7</sup> Chapter VI of the UN Charter refers to the organization’s role in the pacific settlement of disputes that threaten international peace and security and was the authority for most UN peacekeeping missions before 1990. Chapter VII is invoked for operations with more robust mandates and where peacekeepers may use force beyond self-defense. The majority of UN-led peace operations since 1999 have had Chapter VII mandates, including missions in East Timor, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, the DRC, Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Haiti, Burundi, and Sudan.

<sup>8</sup> The US military has defined non-permissive environments – and most recently “hostile environment” – as areas where “hostile forces have control as well as the intent and capability to effectively oppose or react to the operations a unit intends to conduct.” Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02, as amended through 14 April 2006, 390.

<sup>9</sup> David C. Gompert, Courtney Richardson, Richard L. Kugler, and Clifford H. Bernath, *Learning from Darfur: Building a Net-Capable African Force to Stop Mass Killing*, Defense and Technology Paper 15 (Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University, July 2005); Micah Zenko, “Saving Lives With Speed: Using Rapidly Deployable Forces for Genocide Prevention,” *Defense and Security Analysis* 20, no. 1 (March 2004), 3-19.

<sup>10</sup> ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect*, 8. The term “humanitarian intervention” is also used widely to refer to a range of missions, including US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and can lack a clear meaning.

name for the approach to protection needed to provide physical safety in non-permissive environments, as noted in the supplement to the ICISS report.<sup>11</sup> “Coercive protection” describes the specific strategy of using or threatening force for the purpose of protecting civilians, as suggested by *The Responsibility to Protect* for military interventions or for some robust, Chapter VII peacekeeping operations with protection mandates.<sup>12</sup> These types of missions exist somewhere between traditional peace operations, which impartially uphold political mandates, and warfighting, where the goal is to defeat a designated enemy.

### **THE PROBLEM OF PROTECTION: ENACTING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT**

To many observers, the question of how best to protect civilians using military force seems straightforward. “I don’t see what the problem is,” said one. “Troops either protect civilians or they don’t. They either stop militia that are raping and killing, or they stand aside and let it happen.”<sup>13</sup>

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For a number of reasons, however, protecting civilians can be a significant challenge in military operational terms. First, deployed forces may have limited or unclear *authority* to act, even in situations of mass killing and genocide. Troops sent to regions where civilians face violence usually operate with the presumed consent

of the parties on the ground and with the understanding that the sovereign nation is responsible for the protection of its citizens. Such an arrangement is flawed in situations such as Darfur or the DRC, for example, where government forces ignore abuses against civilians, are incapable of halting them, or even take part in the abuses themselves. Nevertheless, few peacekeepers today have the authority of the Security Council to use *all means necessary* to protect civilians.

Second, some states lack *willingness* to offer peacekeepers for operations that use force to protect civilians. Troop contributing countries (TCCs) are not eager to send their troops into harm’s way to engage with armed groups or to challenge a sovereign authority.

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas G. Weiss and Don Hubert, *The Responsibility to Protect: Research, Bibliography, and Background* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, December 2001), 178-203.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-180.

<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International activist, interview with author, Washington, DC, 7 November 2005.

*Box 1.2*

### **HUMAN PROTECTION VS. WARFIGHTING AND PEACEKEEPING**

The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty argued that neither traditional peace operations nor traditional warfighting may be wholly appropriate for protecting civilians from genocide, ethnic cleansing, or mass killing. According to the ICISS report:

7.1 Military interventions for human protection purposes have different objectives than both traditional warfighting and traditional peacekeeping operations. Such interventions therefore raise a number of new, different and unique operational challenges. Because the objective of military intervention is to protect populations and not to defeat or destroy an enemy militarily, it differs from traditional warfighting. While military intervention operations require the use of as much force as is necessary, which may on occasion be a great deal, to protect the population at risk, their basic objective is always to achieve quick success with as little cost as possible in civilian lives and inflicting as little damage as possible so as to enhance recovery prospects in the post-conflict phase. In warfighting, by contrast, the neutralization of an opponent's military or industrial capabilities is often the instrument to force surrender.

7.2 On the other hand, military intervention operations – which have to do whatever it takes to meet their responsibility to protect – will have to be able and willing to engage in much more robust action than is permitted by traditional peacekeeping, where the core task is the monitoring, supervision and verification of ceasefires and peace agreements, and where the emphasis has always been on consent, neutrality and the non-use of force. The *Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* compiled in 2000 a thorough review of the operational challenges facing United Nations military missions, but for the most part that panel focused on traditional peacekeeping and its variations, not the more robust use of military force – not least because there is not within UN headquarters the kind of logistic planning and support, and command and control capacity, that would make possible either warfighting or military interventions of any significant size. Their report confirmed that “the United Nations does not wage war. Where enforcement action is required, it has consistently been entrusted to coalitions of willing states.”

7.3 The context in which intervention operations take place also has important operational significance. Military intervention to protect endangered human lives should and will occur only as a last resort, after the failure of other measures to achieve satisfactory results. Inevitably, it will be part of a broader political strategy directed towards persuading the targeted state to cooperate with international efforts. The consequences for such operations suggest that the specific nature of the task to protect may over time lead to the evolution of a new type of military operation, carried out in new ways.

*Source:* International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, December 2001), 57.

Third, peacekeeping missions may lack sufficient *capacity* to act. If AMIS had a new mandate to protect civilians fully throughout Darfur, without caveats, its capacity would restrict its ability to create a secure environment for the region's seven million civilians. AMIS lacks the size, equipment, mobility, funding, and coordination for such an operation. Even for deployments in smaller regions with less violence, capacity shortfalls are common in modern peace operations.

Finally, troops may lack the *operational guidance* and *military preparation* for specific kinds of missions. If authorized to intervene to protect civilians, forces must be prepared to make tactical and strategic judgments about how to react to threats of abuse against civilians groups. Choices will include whether to strive for the pacification or defeat of the abusive groups, whether to establish broad security or to provide a show of force in a specific area, and how to ensure long-term stability and security once mass killing is brought to a halt. Given limited resources, most missions must decide which civilians to protect and which to leave vulnerable, and how to allocate resources for programs with long-term and short-term benefits. They must also balance operating in as large an area as possible—and protect the maximum number of civilians—with sustaining the protection of the force itself.

These certainly are not easy choices. Troops in such situations must walk a tightrope between using too much and too little force. The balancing act has real consequences, as seen in the UN Mission in the DRC (MONUC) today, where UN peacekeepers in the eastern Ituri region of the country are using robust levels of force for a UN operation, and face both praise and criticism as a result. Praise and criticism also met earlier missions such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) mission in Liberia in the early 1990s, which attempted to stabilize the country but used excessive force and committed human rights abuses. Other operations have used too little force and failed to challenge egregious human rights abusers. The UN Protection Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina (UNPROFOR), the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), and the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) all tried to support weak peace agreements despite ongoing warfare and failed terribly in protecting civilians. In the words of Lt. Gen. Romeo Dallaire, force commander of UNAMIR at the time of the genocide, his efforts to pursue negotiations in the face of unmistakable evil, rather than use force, caused him to “shake hands with the devil.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Roméo A. Dallaire with Brent Beardsley, *Shake Hands With the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (Toronto: Random House, 2003).

Given such challenges, it is *not enough* to deploy forces and hope they figure out an effective protection strategy once they arrive. Civilian protection requires an operational concept to guide troops in facing questions on the ground and a strategic framework for addressing these questions quickly and effectively. It requires, in short, that we “operationalize” the “responsibility to protect” by addressing how both types of missions (peace operations with protection mandates and full-scale “responsibility to protect” military interventions) should be conducted. There are two immediate questions for us today. First, are military forces preparing to lead missions to respond to genocide, ethnic cleansing, or mass killing, where civilian protection is *the* immediate and essential goal of the mission? Second, are forces in peace operations deployed in regions of instability prepared to protect civilians, while simultaneously carrying out their other tasks to achieve the mission’s goals? This study will address how militaries have begun to address such questions and point out the gaps in their operational guidance and preparation.

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## METHODOLOGY

The Henry L. Stimson Center began to investigate these issues in 2004. The Center hosted a small workshop with military and civilian experts in December 2004 to discuss military efforts at “civilian protection” and identify some of the concepts involved.<sup>15</sup> In January 2005, the Center published an initial report on its findings, geared toward an expert audience.<sup>16</sup> The present study expands on the initial report and seeks to introduce a broader audience to the issues involved.

Findings are based on dozens of interviews with military and civilian experts on peace and stability operations within governments, international organizations,

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<sup>15</sup> Workshop, *Operational Capacities for Civilian Protection Missions*, The Henry L. Stimson Center, Washington, DC, 8 December 2004. Participants, many with military experience, came from the United Nations, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, NATO, South Africa, and international NGOs.

<sup>16</sup> Victoria K. Holt, *The Responsibility to Protect: Considering the Operational Capacity for Civilian Protection* (Washington, DC: The Henry L. Stimson Center, January 2005), [www.stimson.org/fopo/?SN=FP20040831715](http://www.stimson.org/fopo/?SN=FP20040831715).

non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and research centers. Interviewees were asked a series of interrelated and seemingly straightforward questions. First, which international organizations have declared a willingness and authority to use military force to halt genocide, ethnic cleansing, or mass killing? Second, what tools do these organizations and their member states typically use to prepare their military forces? Third, have such means been employed to prepare forces for a military mission to protect civilians from genocide, ethnic cleansing, or mass killing in a non-permissive environment? Fourth, have these tools been used to prepare forces in peace operations to implement their “civilian protection” mandates in regions of large-scale violence and/or mass killing?<sup>17</sup>

Answers to the first two questions were relatively easy to find. The UN, NATO, the European Union (EU), the AU, and ECOWAS have authority to conduct military interventions. Such interventions might also be led by coalitions of the willing, endorsed by the UN or by another organization. The typical tools these organizations use to prepare their forces include concepts of operation, doctrine, training, simulations, and gaming. As for the third and fourth questions, the response was surprising and nearly universal: “*I don’t believe there is much that addresses that type of mission or mandate.*”<sup>18</sup>

The full story is not that simple, however. Forces often receive guidance on protecting civilians in more traditional, permissive, and low-threat post-conflict environments, with a focus on the requirements of international humanitarian law. They have become increasingly adept at working with humanitarian organizations, promoting civil order, offering security to internally displaced person (IDP) camps, conducting preventive patrols, and other such tasks vital for the safety and security of civilians.

What is missing is explicit guidance for contingencies that approach or cross the threshold identified by the ICISS—namely genocide, ethnic cleansing, and mass killing. Current situations in Darfur and the DRC highlight this need, where such

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<sup>17</sup> Additional specific questions included: What would a mission to protect civilians from mass killings, ethnic cleansing or genocide in non-permissive, Chapter VII environment look like? Who is willing and able to conduct such missions? What are the operational challenges that need to be met for such missions? Does current doctrine address the conduct of such missions? Do training, simulations, and gaming exercises deal with such missions? Do rules of engagement for such operations address civilian protection scenarios? Where are the gaps, and how can they be addressed?

<sup>18</sup> Many people generously offered insights and leads, however, on the components of capacity that do exist, which serve as the basis for this study. To encourage candor, interviews were mostly conducted on a not-for-attribution basis. For a list of individuals and organizations interviewed, please contact the authors.

violence is taking place today while guidance to forces on how to act remains in development.

Varied definitions also muddle the understanding of what protection means in practice. Few militaries or international organizations have developed concepts, doctrine, and training for missions designed to protect vulnerable civilians from genocide, ethnic cleansing, or mass killing. Even fewer have identified the specific tasks for such missions. Although Security Council resolutions began to call for peace operations to “protect civilians” in insecure environments more than six years ago, the UN is just starting to develop guidance on how to interpret or prepare for this directive. In practical military terms, therefore, there is little evident preparedness for missions to carry out the “responsibility to protect.”<sup>19</sup>

## STRUCTURE

This study is structured to guide the reader through the origins of the “responsibility to protect” concept and UN civilian protection mandates, an analysis of what civilian protection means in a military context, and the preparation of forces towards making it a reality. Chapter 2 addresses *why* the discussion about protecting civilians is timely and important, including background on civilian protection and the evolution of the “responsibility to protect” concept, the emergence of UN civilian protection mandates, and the protection debate today. Chapter 3 identifies the concepts of civilian protection most commonly used by militaries, humanitarian groups, and international organizations, which inform current thinking on the subject. The overlap of concepts and the need for clarity in operationalizing the protection of civilians by forces on the ground is analyzed.

Chapter 4 identifies areas of military preparedness for operationalizing the “responsibility to protect,” including which actors have the *authority* to intervene in genocide and mass killing, and their broad level of *capacity* to undertake such actions. Chapter 5 looks at the significance of mandates and rules of engagement. Chapter 6 then reviews military doctrine in relation to the protection of civilians and Chapter 7 considers training programs in search of relevant guidance on civilian protection. Chapter 8 looks at civilian protection in practice, evaluating the recent approach to protection by peacekeepers in the challenging DRC. Finally, Chapter 9 takes a step back, summarizes key findings, and offers areas for further investigation.

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<sup>19</sup> There may well be more capacity for and understanding of civilian protection in a military context than identified in this study, reflective of a gap between military thinking and an external understanding of that preparedness. Terminology also affects these findings. The definition of civilian protection is still being worked out and language varies across and within civilian and military communities.

This study is *not* a comprehensive analysis of specific military capacities or the literature on humanitarian intervention, although both are considered briefly. Scholars and practitioners have addressed these subjects in thoughtful and important detail elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Instead, this study assumes a level of current military capacity and looks at the nuts and bolts of military preparation for the specific goal of protecting civilians, particularly in hostile environments. It attempts to draw a clearer picture of what the protection of civilians in peace operations and the “responsibility to protect” might mean in military operational terms—and to narrow what is now a wide debate over capacity to a more specific question of how to conduct certain operations. The goal is to make the policy options clearer to decision makers, in part to spur military thinking on the subject, and in part to take stock of how far, exactly, the world has come towards realizing new interventionist norms.

### THE IMPOSSIBLE MANDATE?

The title of this study is purposely provocative. The topic is controversial too. Some observers argue that militaries should not overly involve themselves in “saving strangers.”<sup>21</sup> They worry that humanitarian interventions lead to mission creep, with an open ended task of protecting civilians that is too hard for

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military forces—or a waste of their time—and best left to police forces. To these critics, a mandate for military forces to “protect civilians” is naïve and ignores operational realities. Others present equally sharp arguments in support of using military forces for “good,” and suggest that stopping genocide would be easy if the international community could muster sufficient political will, that the

military’s capacity for warfighting does not prevent it from offering needed humanitarian support, or that an obsession with force protection has prevented military forces from taking sufficient action against abusive armed groups.

Is the protection of civilians “the impossible mandate?” Because so few militaries have considered the operational implications of such a mandate in detail, or outlined the necessary steps for making it a reality, this remains an open question. The answer depends on who is being asked to do what. Asking lightly armed peacekeepers to protect civilians in violent regions without a clear

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<sup>20</sup> For sources on global capacity for peace operations and humanitarian intervention, see Chapter 3.

<sup>21</sup> This term, though not the argument, is borrowed from Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

strategy or sufficient capacity to achieve their aims may be nearly impossible. Asking nations to support a robust military intervention to protect civilians without the consent of the host nation, as suggested by *The Responsibility to Protect*, is also difficult. Both missions face added challenges if they lack sufficient capacity and political leadership to act. Yet much is known about how to structure forces to prepare them to achieve their goals. The chances of success are further improved if the challenges involved in a future mission are considered in advance, and the tools used to prepare armed forces and their leaders are put into practice.

Thus, if the international community expects military forces to effectively protect civilians, forces currently deployed to peace operations with protection mandates badly need more operational guidance. Those leaders who may conduct military interventions to support the “responsibility to protect” also need to prepare for what those missions could entail. Until this takes place, the “responsibility to protect” may remain a mandate that is impossible to execute until the vision aligns with the preparedness of the world’s military forces. The time has come to translate the “responsibility to protect” into terms that militaries can understand and implement—such as concepts of operation, doctrine, training, rules of engagement, and mandates—to move lofty ideals into concrete actions on the ground.