

§6.2 Concluding Remarks

All protection actors need to understand the R2P and POC norms to enable them to contribute fully in efforts to enhance protection.

“R2P and POC have powerful synergies and mutually reinforcing applications.”

- » They are both international principles that protect vulnerable people in situations of violence.
- » They are both closely intertwined with a range of instruments of international law, including strong legal prohibitions on violence against the unarmed.
- » They both exhort a diverse group of actors to positive protective and preventive action, putting in place backup and failsafe obligations in cases where the initial legal duties are unfulfilled or ineffective.
- » In the worst of cases, when conflicts descend into atrocities that threaten international peace and security, both sets of principles converge in looking to the Security Council for decisive action.

R2P and POC are distinct norms, but share common goals – namely, the saving of civilian lives from conflict and mass violence — and common applications. Neither POC nor R2P should function without awareness of the normative, institutional and operational requirements of the other. Protecting vulnerable people requires that protection actors – whether R2P or POC – work in mutually supportive roles, and not at cross-purposes.

Yet despite these important similarities, and notwithstanding the specific cases where the two principles will overlap in scope and content, the differences between the two principles must not be dissolved.

“POC and R2P should not be conflated. They are and must remain distinct principles.”

POC aims to protect a broad range of the human rights of civilians in armed conflicts and other situations of mass violence.

- » Individual indiscretions by individual combatants, and the mistreatment of civilians and soldiers *hors de combat*, should be prevented, even if these do not rise to the pitch of atrocity crimes.
- » Strategies and types of engagement – for instance by peacekeepers and humanitarians – can improve civilian protection in these cases, even if these methods would not be productive (or even possible) in the extreme cases of atrocities.

The visible and urgent status of R2P crimes that “shock the conscience of humanity” should not distract from the more prevalent and everyday abuses of civilians in the situations of violence that POC polices

R2P aims to protect the most basic rights of security for populations that are targeted for deliberate, systematic, mass violence.

- » Because of its narrow scope – covering only the four atrocity crimes – R2P has a deeper and more tractable preventive agenda; preventing armed conflict in general is impossible, but the prevention of atrocity crimes through early warning and timely action presents as a challenging, but potentially worthwhile, undertaking.
- » R2P’s narrow focus also makes its capacity to respond to violations greater. Because atrocity crimes are accepted by every international actor as “beyond the pale” of what is acceptable, defences based on sovereignty and non-intervention in domestic affairs are increasingly inadmissible.
- » **Atrocity crimes present very specific normative, institutional and operational challenges, and POC methods that work in lesser conflicts may be ineffective. However, the urgency and moral gravity of atrocity crimes allows new responses to become possible. These factors make R2P indispensable for the protection of vulnerable persons.**