Exploring the Nexus between Geopolitics and Intervention for Human Protection Purposes: Lessons from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Responses to the Humanitarian Crisis in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT This article seeks to discuss the connection between geopolitics and the new United Nations (UN) norm for intervention for human protection purposes, known as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), by examining the Southern African Development Community's (SADC's) responses to the humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe. Factoring a geopolitical dimension to the Zimbabwe crisis is necessary to understand why the country's economic and political turmoil became internationalised and, by implication, a policy responsibility for SADC. Zimbabwe represents a case where the SADC was/is still reluctant and hesitant to lead the international community into fully operationalising the R2P. It is argued that the lack of implementation (or only partial implementation) of R2P by the SADC bloc is a result of geopolitical imperatives such as economic interests, shared liberation war experiences, unresolved colonial inequalities and the fact that the region's governments venerate the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference to the detriment of good governance and human rights observation. It is further argued that SADC's blind solidarity with the government of Zimbabwe has misled the international community into believing that the crisis is a geopolitical matter that can be contained and resolved by regional solutions.