

POLITICALLY SPEAKING
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The Olympics, an international success. Syria, an international failure. What can Canada do?

At time of writing, the London Olympics are just ending. What a wonderful example of the members of the international community competing with each other, but doing so peacefully, with respect, often even friendship. It is a wonder of international cooperation.

At the same time, however, Bashar al-Assad's frightful regime in Syria is waging war against its own people. By the time of the concluding celebrations of the London Olympics, over 20,000 people have been killed in Syria. The conflict rages, with daily reports of more killing and torture of both rebels and innocents, the regime unleashing ever more violent air and ground fire power against its own people.

How ironic. The two jostle each other for newspaper headline space, with their stories and photos sometimes appearing directly side by side on the page. One, an example of the international community cooperating and engaging in healthy competition; the other, an example of the utter failure of that very same international community to cooperate enough to save the lives of thousands of innocent people. While the international community celebrates, joyously, in London, that same international community is completely failing the people of Syria.

There had, briefly, been a glimmer of hope. Only a short time before, the people of Libya had risen up against their own autocratic and brutal regime. But what a difference! In Libya, the

international community *DID* engage. When Moammar Gadhafi and his regime responded to peaceful protests with brutal and escalating violence, the United Nations invoked the Canadian-inspired and Canadian-promoted doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) to establish and enforce a no-fly-zone over Libya. R2P was born from the dismay at the world's inability to stop the massacres of Srebrenica and Rwanda, but had not yet been used. Libya was the first time.

Adding to the Canadian connection, the UN-sanctioned R2P mission in Libya was led by the Canadians under Lieutenant-General Charles Bouchard. This effort allowed the Libyan people to eventually overthrow their dictator Muammar Ghaddafi. It was clear that without it, the regime would have continued its brutal suppression of the rebels and the killing and torture of innocent civilians. Instead, Libyans have just democratically elected their own government for the first time.

But what now? The Libyan experience offered hope. It seemed, finally, that the international community could cooperate, to intervene when needed. Instead, so soon after the Libyan success, the rest of the world has completely failed the people of Syria. Russia and China have used their UN Security Council vetos to prevent any action. And now no country, or even group of countries, is willing to take action without the legitimacy that a UN resolution would provide.

What can Canada do? Unfortunately, despite Canada's reputation of helping to establish the UN; establishing the concept of international peacekeeping; devising the doctrine of R2P and getting it accepted at the UN; and then most recently in leading the Libyan R2P mission—we are walking away from this new challenge. The Harper government's disdain for the UN is

palpable. Canada was recently, for the first time, passed over for a seat on the UN Security Council, for the first time, clearly because the Harper government didn't want it.

The frustration with the UN is valid, and its inability to do anything for the people of Syria has only served to emphasize its ineffectiveness. It is clear that the UN needs fixing—the world has changed since its creation after WWII. But is the answer to walk away? If we simply let it disappear, what would replace it? A return to a world where the big military powers can unilaterally invade, or control others by threat, to get their way?

That is not the world I want. But rather than throwing up our hands and dismissing the UN as broken (the Harper mantra), Canada can, and should, step up and help fix it. Flawed as it is, it is better than nothing at all, and there is much to build on. I'm proud of how Canada has, from its beginnings, played a bigger role and exercised more influence in the world than its relatively small population would warrant. I know many others are too. But we're losing it. Let's get back to work promoting peace and protecting innocents who need help. It is wonderful that the international community can compete together in harmony on the sporting field or in the swimming pool—but we cannot stand by while massacres of innocent people and other atrocities occur before our eyes.