This study is about reform of the United Nations. The study does not address reform proposals that set out to change the organizational structure of the UN, but focuses on initiatives that affect the normative basis of the international society that the United Nations and the UN Charter enable and sustain. Empirically, the study focuses on the international principle responsibility to protect, which prescribes that states have an individual and collective responsibility to protect against severe human rights violations. It is argued that the responsibility to protect and the Security Council’s increased attention to protection of civilians in armed conflicts are politically and legally significant developments that challenge the pluralist international order that was instituted through the establishment of the UN in 1945.

Both the responsibility to protect and the protection of civilians are based on an understanding of statehood and international society that in the study is referred to as anti-pluralist. The results of the study show that the contemporary notion of protection once again brings into international political discourse the idea that states and political communities, in order to enjoy legal autonomy and a right to non-intervention, must abide by universally applicable standards of statehood. The results also show that the idea of protection is based on a progressivist philosophy that leads to a differentiation of states.
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