

Coalitions of the willing

Bottom-up arms control

Coalitions of the willing have been accused of undermining multilateralism. But if they work from the bottom up, they can actually strengthen global governance. Witness the efforts to ban landmines and, most recently, cluster munitions

By **Ko Colijn**

The Bush administration has been criticized for preferring ‘coalitions of the willing’ over multilateralism. But there are ‘good’ coalitions too. Remember the one that laid the basis for the 1997 treaty banning landmines. What began as an initiative of a few like-minded countries and NGOs is now supported by 155 states parties. In pursuit of the landmine ban, Canada and Norway invented their own negotiating forum, outside the structure of the United Nations, which they then took to the UN as a *fait accompli*.

History seems to be repeating itself, as another coalition of the willing is taking the lead. This time it has grown out of frustration with the inability of the UN Committee on Disarmament (CD) to reach agreement on a ban on cluster munitions. In this case, again led by Norway, 46 countries reached political agreement on the so-called Oslo Declaration on Cluster Munitions on 22 February 2007. The participating countries committed themselves to concluding, by the end of 2008, ‘a legally binding international instrument that will prohibit the use, production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions that cause unacceptable harm to civilians’. However, the Oslo conference was not attended by the United States, Russia and China, all permanent members of the UN Security Council. No surprise that they, together with Japan and Poland, did not sign the declaration.

Ad hoc coalitions

Both of these can be described as bottom-up arms control initiatives. They both originated from grassroots pressure groups supported by *ad hoc* coalitions of states that, on their own, have little impact on international security politics. These initiatives are based on strong feelings of moral legitimacy and shared disgust of landmines and cluster munitions. After giving the UN a fair chance, the countries that launched the cluster munitions movement rejected the ‘royal diplomacy’ of seeking the broadest possible multilateral platform. They left the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva, thereby giving up some ‘input legitimacy’, to use the term coined by Fritz Scharpf. This represents, in the field of international relations, the purest and most respected procedure for achieving a goal – through international democratic institutions. Instead, the coalition opted to maximize its ‘output legitimacy’. Defending the urgency of a ban on this category of inhumane weapons, they chose the moral high ground and results over procedure. Moreover, ten years of experience with the landmine ban justified their optimism about the growth potential of the initiative. Indeed, what started out as a small coalition gradually became a multilateral effort – there are



Cluster bombs in Herat, Afghanistan.

now 150+ signatories to the Convention banning landmines – putting the non-signatory states increasingly on the defensive.

One may wonder why US-led coalitions of the willing are criticized as further proof of the hegemonic politics of the Bush administration. Take the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), announced by President Bush in May 2003. This eleven-nation alliance aimed to pursue the interdiction of ships and aircraft suspected of transporting weapons of mass destruction to hostile states and terrorists. At the time, this goal could hardly be described as ‘lacking in morality’, and even less so after the seizure of nuclear contraband on a ship destined for a secret weapons programme in Libya in 2004. The difficulties in gaining support were procedural as well as political. The Bush administration invited countries to participate on a selective basis and made no secret of its leadership role. The PSI was a top-down, rather than a bottom-up, coalition of the willing.

It is tempting to conclude that coalitions of the willing are not ‘bad’ instruments *per se*. They do not undermine the multilateral ideal. They might even, in the long run, strengthen multilateralism by extending its scope – as was the case with landmines. Based on this very small but interesting sample of cases in the field of security, the ‘rightfulness’ of *ad hoc* coalitions seems to depend not on their output legitimacy – because they all have results – but rather on their bottom-up character and the transparency of recruitment. ■

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A global pro bono law firm

For academics and policy makers working with conflict and reconstruction, it is almost impossible to keep track of what's going on in the dozens of countries involved in disputes. To help them, the Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG, www.pilpg.org) publishes a weekly electronic newsletter, *Peace Negotiations Watch*, which compiles articles about ongoing conflicts and peace processes.

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Because of its diverse network of volunteers, PILPG maintains points of contact in many cities, including The Hague. In 2005, several of PILPG's former pro bono clients nominated the Group for the Nobel Peace Prize. Although the articles compiled in Peace Negotiations Watch can be found elsewhere, the links to background documents and legal analyses written by PILPG experts provide real added value. www.publicinternationallaw.org/peace

Assessing Aid assessed

The World Bank has launched what seems to be a remarkably self-critical research programme. It is going to reassess an earlier, very influential set of policy advice and analyses of good and bad governance that was published more than eight years ago.

In 1998 the Development Research Group



Photo: Brand X/HH

of the World Bank published *Assessing Aid – What Works, What Doesn't, and Why*. The report generated heated debate, and has influenced policies giving priority to improving governance in developing countries. Money, the report noted, can have a big impact, but only if countries have good (economic) institutions and policies. Since 1998 aid budgets have increased substantially, but questions about aid effectiveness persist.

The Bank's new research programme on aid effectiveness investigates the conditions under which aid is most likely to succeed. It uses several approaches, starting from three questions:

- Does aid effectiveness depend on recipient countries' policies and institutions? Following (criticisms of) *Assessing Aid*, the role of policies and institutions will be revisited. The focus will be on outcomes other than economic growth, testing the quality of aid rather than just quantity, and shifting from country-level to state- or even project-level data.

- Does aid facilitate policy reform? If external pressure should and can affect policy making in developing countries, what makes

the difference? Empirical evidence suggests that (financial) aid can support governments committed to institutional reform, but cannot force uncommitted governments. There are reasons to believe that the diffusion of development ideas (as opposed to financial aid) has had a larger impact. So why is it that some countries adopt new ideas while others do not?

- How does aid affect the allocation of government spending? Much more aid (than 15 years ago) is spent in social sectors and less in 'productive' sectors, which should attract private investment. Within sectors, the focus has shifted to primary education and healthcare, including HIV/Aids. Other research will address how civil society can influence budget priorities.

- World Bank: Aid Effectiveness, Human Development & Public Services programme: <http://econ.worldbank.org/programs>

- World Bank (1998) *Assessing Aid – What Works, What Doesn't, and Why*. New York: Oxford University Press. <http://econ.worldbank.org/prr>

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