Transnational Advocacy Coalitions and Human Security Initiatives: Explaining Success and Failure

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Foreword
Warren Clarke has studied three issues in the field of modern warfare and civil security: the control of land mines, small arms, and cluster bombs. In his meticulously documented comparative study, he shows how a complex web of international civil society organizations, advocacy coalitions, and "norm entrepreneurs" have adopted and addressed each of the three issues. He also succeeds in suggesting plausible explanations of the differential outcomes of the respective campaigns, as well as of the patterns of interaction between movement activism and state elites.

Claus Offe
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Since the end of the Cold War transnational advocacy coalitions have sought, and to some degree obtained, greater influence in the framing and construction of international security issues. This activity has arguably been most impactful in the promotion of the human security agenda.¹ In this vein, the success of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) in obtaining a full ban on the stockpiling and use of these weapons is often heralded as demonstrative of the increased influence of transnational civil society in international security affairs.² Despite initial optimism, however, in the ten years following the completion of the Ottawa Process this new model for transnational advocacy has experienced only limited success. This paper will thus compare the ICBL movement to the similar but far less successful International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA).³ It is posited that the divergent outcomes of these two campaigns can be attributed to three primary factors. First, the issue of landmines is ultimately more amenable to successful transnational advocacy than the issue of small arms and light weapons. Second, in contrast to the relative effectiveness of the ICBL, the lack of both effective norm entrepreneurs and clear leadership within the IANSA movement has served to limit its influence. Third, despite efforts to replicate the Ottawa Process the IANSA movement has failed to recreate the dynamics of NGO-state cooperation which were vital to the ICBL’s success. These conjectures will then be applied tentatively to the newly minted Oslo Initiative, which resulted in the adoption of a treaty banning cluster munitions on May 28 2008. Overall, it is concluded that the success of transnational advocacy campaigns in the realm of human security is strongly correlated with the substantive characteristics of the issue itself, the individual and structural level attributes of the advocacy coalition involved, and the dynamics of the partnership between this coalition and like-minded state actors.

As noted by Keck and Sikkink, transnational advocacy networks are most likely to be successful on “issues involving physical harm to vulnerable or innocent individuals,” particularly when the “causal story that establishes who bears responsibility or guilt ... (is) sufficiently short and clear.”⁴ These conditions are clearly met by the anti-personnel landmines issue, and the ICBL subsequently made effective use of visual and print media and public information.
campaigns to emphasize large and indiscriminate human cost of landmines. Moreover as landmines are primarily military instruments, state actors clearly bore responsibility and guilt within the “causal story.” These issue characteristics allowed ICBL members to effectively re-frame the mines issue from an initial conception based on military and state security to a focus on humanitarian concerns. Here, the ICBL benefitted from the relative clarity of both the problem and solution to the anti-personnel landmines issue. This humanitarian frame was further emphasized by the graphic nature of the suffering experienced by landmine victims, which was continually highlighted to great effect by ICBL organizations. As such, the ICBL was able to establish a cognitive frame which helped “transform other actors’ understandings of their identities and their interests,” and successfully move towards a clear norm against the use of anti-personnel landmines. Indeed as Don Hubert correctly argues, “once the issue was cast in humanitarian terms, it became difficult for states to resist the logic of a ban.”

The ICBL’s effectiveness was further enhanced by two additional characteristics of the landmines issue. Importantly, the ICBL was able to “graft” the new norm against the use of anti-personnel landmines to pre-existing norms relating to the use of problematic weapons and the tenants of “just war doctrine,” such as protection of civilians. As Finnemore and Sikkink have argued, “efforts to promote a new norm take place within the standards of ‘appropriateness’ defined by prior norms.” In this context Price correctly notes that the success of the land mines initiative was “hinged crucially on the grafting of moral opprobrium from other delegitimized practices of warfare.” Moreover the landmines campaign benefited from the limited military utility provided by mines themselves, which may have ameliorated some state resistance to the ban. Clearly then, the landmines issue provided fertile ground for the influence of transnational advocacy networks on the inter-state negotiating process.

The issue of small arms and light weapons is in some ways similar to anti-personnel landmines. Much like the landmines issue, small arms often cause visual and graphic harm to vulnerable populations and innocent civilians. Nevertheless, crucial differences between the two issues have made small arms a more difficult topic for transnational advocacy. As some scholars have noted, unlike landmines, the issue of small arms involves a more difficult and complex “causal story,” given the variety of actors and uses involved with these weapons. This reality has made it more difficult for the IANSA to construct a coherent and persuasive cognitive frame
for the small arms issue. The nature of the small arms issue also renders the process of norm grafting more difficult. Despite their undeniably destructive effects small arms are – unlike landmines – inherently discriminatory in the damage they cause and are thus not as easily associated with norms of civilian protection. Competing norms have consequently emerged, suggesting that “a legal opportunity to own and use firearms is and should be afforded to individuals, groups and governments for various reasons.” These difficulties have, to date, partially impeded IANSA from constructing a clear norm which can be effectively advocated to or embraced by target actors.

While issue characteristics have influenced the relative success of both the landmines and small arms networks, the internal dynamics of these movements have also impacted, and in many ways exacerbated, these predispositions. The landmines movement has been consistently characterized by capable norm entrepreneurs, strong leadership, and effective organization. As Finnemore and Sikkink note, during the initial stages of “norm emergence” “norm entrepreneurs are critical...because they call attention to issues or even ‘create’ issues by using language that names, interprets, and dramatizes them.” Prior to the creation of the ICBL in 1993 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) served in this role, actively engaging in “information politics” through the promotion and diffusion of statistical and testimonial information regarding the humanitarian toll of landmines. Joined by other influential NGOs, such as the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, the ICRC organized symposiums for information distribution throughout the early 1990s, with the express purpose of influencing government policy. Discussing the influence of these early endeavours, Price notes that:

“These and similar transnational gatherings of experts, and the knowledge produced by them, has certain affinities with the role of epistemic communities. Their role differs, however, from that of epistemic communities, because the organizers are not experts to whom governments turn to for knowledge in times of uncertainty but rather are better seen as moral entrepreneurs...bound by a common agenda of creating international norms.”

Following the creation of the ICBL in 1993, its member organizations ratcheted-up their promotion of the emergent anti-landmine norm through the use of “symbolic politics” and “moral leverage” politics. Symbolically, the movement utilized visual tools such as the creation
of shoe piles, representing the lost limbs of landmine victims, to underscore the humanitarian impact of these weapons. NGOs also gained moral leverage through the “mobilization of shame,” by creating lists of “good” and “bad” countries in terms of landmine policy. Finally, the attention was drawn to the issue by the advocacy of public figures such as Princess Diana and Archbishop Desmond Tutu and prominent government officials such as Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy. Thus, through measures such as these the ICBL was able to both re-frame the landmine’s issue and subsequently influence some states’ perceptions of their national interest.

These efforts were buttressed by the strong leadership and effective organization which characterized the ICBL. Utilizing Bennett’s influential framework, Grillot, Stepley and Hanna identify the ICBL as a “first generation network,” given that it is “NGO centered, focus(ed) on a single issue, and aim(s) to achieve policy changes from institutional targets such as governments.” The ICBL’s official “steering committee” remained limited, though it expanded from its initial six members as the campaign progressed, and action was facilitated by Jody Williams, the campaign’s coordinator and eventual recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Moreover, despite its diverse membership the ICBL’s mission remained clear and unequivocal: the banning of anti-personnel landmines. This semi-hierarchical structure and degree of relative unity thus allowed the ICBL to remain “on message” in the framing of the landmines issue.

Conversely, the IANSA movement has been plagued by a lack of leadership and organizational structure. While norm entrepreneurs within the small arms movement, such as Michael Klare and Edward Laurence, have been partially successful in placing their issue on the international agenda, the initial impetus for action on this issue emerged from an epistemic community, comprised of academics, rather than from NGOs or transnational advocacy networks. Indeed, “the non-governmental organization activist side of small arms norm building took relatively long to flourish...as small arms was first a scholarly led subject.” While this epistemic community engaged fairly successfully in “information politics,” through the dissemination of various publications related to the issue, these actors were ill-equipped in the “symbolic” and “moral leverage” areas of issue advocacy. Despite its widely publicized connection to the landmines movement, during the “norm emergence” phase no singularly
effective norm entrepreneur emerged to frame the small arms issue and persuade and promote solutions to target actors. Subsequent NGO attention to the issue has failed to adequately address this deficiency. While IANSA has certainly sought to engage in symbolic politics, particularly through the use of artistic visual images, the complexity of the small arms issue and its inherent susceptibility to multiple and contradictory cognitive frames has been compounded by the inability of the IANSA movement to agree internally on how the issue should be promoted.36 This problem is consistent with the classification of IANSA as a “second generation network,” characterized by “relaxed framing,” a “decentralized, diverse, and leaderless” structure, and multiple organizations “connected by some common idea but not all focused on a particular or central goal.”37 Not surprisingly then, this internal confusion has impeded IANSA’s ability to engage in effective strategies of persuasion on the small arms issue.38 Thus, Karp concludes that “above all, the (small arms) movement has been inhibited by the inability of control advocates to frame the issue in terms of readily understood and easily shared goals.”39

The success of both the ICBL and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction was also attributable in part to the productive partnership forged during the Ottawa process between NGOs and like-minded states. Though some suspicion was present on both sides, this coalition of diverse actors became united by a strong commitment to a full ban on anti-personnel landmines, evolving to form the “core group” of supporters of the Ottawa Process.40 The establishment of a cooperative relationship was recognized early as “essential to building the political will to achieve a global ban on anti-personnel mines,” and thus emerged as an initial goal of the Process.41 This partnership would prove essential to the mine-ban’s eventual success. As Cameron notes, without the cooperation of sympathetic states “the ICBL would never have been able to engage in the diplomatic lobbying necessary to negotiate a convention.”42 The countries within the core group provided the ICBL with unprecedented access to the negotiating process, often through membership in state delegations, and were able to place pressure on reluctant countries through mechanisms such as diplomatic missions.43 From the states’ perspective, the ICBL provided information, resources and public support, thus “giving these states a stronger bargaining position.”44 Finally, both states and the ICBL benefited from the “sharing of information and close coordination.”45 Thus it is clear that, as Cameron notes, “had
the ambivalence on the part of governments and NGOs about working together in partnership not been overcome, the mine ban would almost certainly not have been negotiated or signed.”

Given these benefits, throughout the Ottawa Process the core group developed a remarkable degree of trust and unity. The development of this close alliance is particularly striking given the often suspicious and antagonistic relationship between governments and transnational advocacy coalitions. Group cohesion was enhanced by the unwillingness of all members of the group to compromise on their overriding goal of a total ban on anti-personnel landmines. This cohesion was most pronounced at the individual level, as ICBL members felt that certain policy-makers, particularly Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy, were both trustworthy and committed to their overall objectives. Such clarity of purpose amongst the core group allowed the ICBL to work closely with these states while maintaining the independence of its organizations and without succumbing to excessive cooption. The movement’s independence was demonstrated by its members’ willingness to diverge from the positions of its core group allies on key issues. During the drafting stage of the treaty, for example, the ICBL differed significantly from some of its core group partners by insisting “on a less ambiguous definition” of an anti-personnel mine. Ultimately, these groups were successful in obtaining their preferred outcome in the treaty text. It thus appears clear that the ICBL successfully achieved an effective balance between cooperation and autonomy in its partnership with sympathetic states.

In its interaction with states the IANSA movement has made obvious attempts to mimic the success of the landmines campaign. Indeed, observers of the landmines process have noted that “one crucial lesson (was) that states and social movements can work in partnership to enhance their capabilities (and) to bring publicity to neglected issues.” As such IANSA has attempted to establish links with like-minded middle and small powers such as Canada and Norway, and has achieved some success in attracting financial supporters. Ultimately, however, the small arms network has failed to recreate the dynamics of the core group partnership present during the landmines process. Most fundamentally, IANSA has experienced more difficulty in attracting sympathetic partner states to its cause. As Grillot, Stapely, and Hanna rightly note, “many states, even some previously involved with the landmine campaign, have strong incentives to manufacture, sell, and transfer such weapons.” Sympathetic
individuals within government, such as Lloyd Axworthy, have also subsequently left public office, leaving IANSA with fewer trustworthy individuals with which to network. Finally, hesitant states have proved more prepared to resist NGO pressure in the wake of the landmines campaign.\textsuperscript{56}

Due to this lack of receptivity and the complexity of the issue, the movement has been unable to establish a clear unity of purpose amongst a coalition of like-minded state actors. The small arms network has thus consistently struggled to attain the necessary balance between partnership and autonomy achieved by the ICBL. As a result, some commentators have suggested that the small arms movement has been co-opted and is consistently manipulated by the European governments who represent its major source of financial resources and diplomatic access.\textsuperscript{57} Indeed as Karp notes, in this “Faustian bargain” the IANSA organizations have “become dependent,” and have subsequently lost “the independence required to press for dramatic change.”\textsuperscript{58} This is demonstrated by the movement’s continued willingness to focus exclusively on illicit arms trade, and the success of states “in limiting international agreements (on small arms and light weapons) to the lowest common denominator.”\textsuperscript{59} Thus, it is clear that the small arms movement has been far less successful than the ICBL in both generating support from sympathetic states and in maintaining its autonomy. Given the importance of core group unity in the ultimate success of the landmines campaign, this failure continues to represent a major weakness in the IANSA’s attempt to regulate the trade in small arms and light weapons.

This paper’s conclusions appear substantiated by the recent adoption of a ban treaty on cluster munitions. The draft Convention on Cluster Munitions defines these weapons as “a conventional munition that is designed to disperse or release explosive submunitions.”\textsuperscript{60} Advocacy on this issue has been spearheaded by the Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC), which comprises approximately 200 civil society organizations.\textsuperscript{61} In terms of success, the CMC occupies a midway point between the landmines and small arms initiatives. While the treaty banning cluster munitions has received the widespread support of 111 states, some experts have suggested that it contains a number of problematic clauses which lessen its overall impact, indicating that it is less rigorous than the landmines treaty.\textsuperscript{62} Nevertheless the international acceptance of this treaty, which commits states to destroy their stockpiles of cluster munitions within an eight year timeframe, represents a major accomplishment for the CMC.
In a number of ways the Oslo Initiative to ban cluster munitions resembles the Ottawa Process. Indeed, pursuing a norm against the use of such weapons appears a natural follow-up to the landmines campaign, and the ICBL itself has been highly active within the context of the CMC. Cluster munitions – which exact a visible humanitarian cost and possess a clear and identifiable responsibility bearer – fulfill Keck and Sikkink’s issue characteristics for successful transnational advocacy. CMC members, moreover, have explicitly attempted to graft the emergent norm against the use and stockpiling of cluster munitions to the now widely accepted international norm against the use of anti-personnel landmines. Activists involved with the CMC have compared it to the Ottawa Process and emphasized the similarities of both campaigns.\textsuperscript{63} In recognition of this influence the draft treaty text explicitly references the international norm established by the 1997 landmines treaty.\textsuperscript{64} In this context, it may be more accurate to consider the emerging norm against cluster munitions as an extension of the norm against the use of landmines, rather than as an independent norm itself. The somewhat less impressive results of the cluster munitions campaign are likely more attributable to the greater military significance of these weapons relative to that provided by anti-personnel landmines. Still, the issue characteristics of cluster munitions appear well suited for successful transnational advocacy.

Various norm entrepreneurs from the landmines process, such as Jody Williams, have also been actively involved in the cluster munitions campaign. These norm entrepreneurs enhanced the profile of the cluster munitions issue through the provision of information, in the form of both statistical reports and real life stories of cluster munitions victims, to the public and government actors.\textsuperscript{65} The structured nature of the CMC also more closely resembles a first generation than a second generation network. Indeed as Cave observes, “the CMC imitates the ICBL’s basic structure with a campaign coordinator and a steering committee of selected member organizations to oversee progress, but no central office or permanent secretariat.”\textsuperscript{66} Similar to the landmines example, this semi-hierarchical structure, combined with the unity of purpose engendered by the pursuit of a ban on cluster munitions, has allowed the CMC a degree of coherence in its communications strategy which continues to elude the small arms movement. Thus both issue and movement characteristics have operated to allow the CMC to reframe the cluster munitions issue in humanitarian rather than military terms. The success of this strategy is illustrated by the shifting stance of the British government on the issue. Prime Minister Gordon
Brown originally opposed a full ban due to the weapon’s “justified military application for the protection of British troops overseas,” but reversed his government’s position to full support in May 2008 in recognition of the “unacceptable harm to civilians” wrought by the weapons. Further, even states which ultimately opposed the treaty have been forced to acknowledge the CMC’s humanitarian frame. Tom Casey, a US state department spokesperson, noted that “the United States shares the humanitarian concerns of those in Dublin,” though he maintained that “cluster munitions have demonstrated military utility.” This recognition of the humanitarian cost of cluster munitions suggests clearly that the CMC has been at least partially successful in reframing the debate on the use of these weapons, as well as in altering the interest calculations of a number of states.

Finally, the effectiveness of the CMC was enhanced by the productive partnership the movement established with a coalition of like-minded states. As with the landmines process these states – particularly Norway and Belgium – achieved a surprising degree of unity with their NGO counterparts. Both took steps to unilaterally restrict the use of cluster munitions prior to engaging the international campaign. Individuals within these states, such as Belgian Senator Philippe Mahoux, have also demonstrated a considerable and sustained commitment to a full ban and worked closely with NGOs to achieve shared goals. The Norwegian government in particular has played an active role as a norm entrepreneur on this issue, catalyzing the Oslo Initiative in late 2006. Thus as with the landmines process, this partnership has produced considerable benefits for both the states and civil society actors involved. Nevertheless, despite the obvious advantages of this cooperative relationship it is equally clear that the NGOs involved have retained the requisite degree of independence from the sponsor states. When evidence surfaced in 2006 that the Norwegian government was not fully complying with its domestic commitments on cluster munitions, for example, NGOs seized the issue as an opportunity to leverage “accountability politics,” in order to “expose the distance between (the government’s) discourse and practice.” The subsequent embarrassment suffered by the Norwegian government pushed policymakers to enact a full moratorium on the use of these weapons, and helped to spur Norway’s international action on the issue later that year. Thus, as with the landmines case, the key to the cluster munitions partnership was based on the CMC’s maintenance of a suitable balance between cooperation and autonomy with its state partners.
In the context of the three cases examined here, transnational advocacy coalitions appear clearly capable of exerting substantial influence on the international security agenda, particularly in areas related to the concept of human security. The ability of such campaigns to achieve their desired outcomes is, however, conditioned by a number of factors. Though not formulaic, success in these cases is strongly correlated with the substantive characteristics of the issue itself, the individual and structural level attributes of the advocacy coalition involved, and the dynamics of the partnership between this coalition and like-minded state actors. Thus, these interrelated factors are likely to strongly affect advocacy coalition influence.
1 As defined by one of its main proponents, former Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy, the concept of human security “seeks to shift (international norms) from traditional national security concerns towards ways of protecting the security of individuals.” Axworthy, Lloyd. Navigating a New World: Canada’s Global Future. (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2003) 56
3 Despite its connection with the landmines process and some limited achievements, the small arms movement has been far less in transnational advocacy. Indeed, some involved in the movement have suggested that its attempts to limit the damage caused by small arms have been a “complete and abject failure.” For more information, see: Grillot, Suzette, Stapley, Craig, and Molly Hanna. “Assessing the Small Arms Movement: The Trials and Tribulations of a Transnational Network.” Contemporary Security Policy. 21:1 (2006)
4 Keck, Margaret and Kathryn Sikkink. Activists Beyond Borders; Advocacy Networks in International Politics. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 27
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12 This is particularly true in the example of biological and chemical weapons. As noted by Kjellman, Kjell Erling. “The Power of Persuasion: Transnational Activism and Normative Processes.” International Peace Research Institute. (2007) pg. 14
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