A Bloodless War: An Analysis of the Weapons used by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines

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How do NGOs Influence Policies by Means of International Campaigning? Discuss Keck and Sikkink's Model of Transnational Advocacy Networks, and Provide Examples.

The modern age has undergone a transformation of the political arena. Politics are no longer conducted by states alone. Rather, a myriad of non-state actors have rapidly emerged on the international stage and are exercising increasing influence on political activities. One of the most significant non-state actors to this effect are transnational advocacy networks, commonly referred to as TANs. TANs are value-motivated networks of activists who seek to influence policy in a given issue area.[i] They can be comprised of think tanks, social movements, the media, religious institutions, unions, intellectuals, IOs, and even some parts of government, although it is usually NGOs that "play a central role in most advocacy networks."[ii]

TANs do not posses 'power' in the traditional sense, and must therefore use alternative tools to promote their agendas. Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink contend that TANs use "the power of their information, ideas, and strategies, to alter the information and value contexts within which states make policies."[iii] Together these tools constitute a persuasive mechanism through which TANs "seek to gain leverage over more powerful institutions" and socialize policymakers to adopt certain norms [iv]

In their work, *Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics,* Keck and Sikkink offer a categorized typology of the strategies TANs use to this end. In broad terms, their model breaks down the techniques into 'framing', and 'persuasive politics'. Both of these tactics involves the strategic use of TAN's "most valuable currency"–information.[v]

Briefly, the development of 'cognitive frames' or 'framing' involves both 'frame alignment' and 'frame resonance'; the former relating to how TANs are able to align their mission with broader policy goals, and the latter to how well their ideas resonate with decision makers.[vi] The use of 'persuasive politics' highlights the various ways TANs engage in the strategic use of information to exert influence and induce policymakers to take action. Keck and Sikkink classify these persuasive tactics into information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics.[vii]

Taken together, the aforementioned strategies constitute Keck and Sikkink's model for how TANs influence policies by means of international campaigning. This essay will seek to add a context to this model by providing real-life examples of how these tactics were pursued in the international arena and what effects they had on policymaking. Specifically, I will draw connections between Keck and Sikkinks model and the activities of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), widely heralded as one of the most successful TANs of our time, to shed some light on what strategies successful TANs have pursued in their efforts to shape policy.

Framing

The Model

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Keck and Sikkink highlight framing as one of the strategies TANs utilize to motivate policymakers to act in accordance with their interests. They define framing as the "conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action." [viii] Drawing on the work of David Snow, Keck and Sikkink categorize framing into frame alignment and frame resonance.

Frame alignment refers to the process whereby TANs seek to "[render] events or occurrences meaningful" to the wider public.[ix] In this regard, they seek to frame issues in new and innovative ways that will be in accordance with broader policy goals. In other words, they seek to shape their agendas to "fit with favorable institutional values" and norms.[x] Echoing Keck and Sikkink, Richard Price terms this strategy 'grafting' and also maintains that it forms part of TAN's manipulative arsenal.[xi]

Frame resonance, on the other hand, refers to how well the ideas TANs espouse resonate with policymakers. This "involves both the frame's internal coherence and its fit with a broader political culture."[xii] In order to enhance a message's receptiveness, TANs will look for hospitable venues where their ideas are more likely to resonate well with their audience. The dual strategy of frame alignment and frame resonance is called 'venue shopping.'[xiii]

Keck and Sikkink argue that framing certain norms by embedding them within a preexisting moral structure will produce more successful international campaigns. For example, framing an issue in terms of the universal norm of preventing human suffering will yield more policy changes than trying to superimpose an agenda that may not resonate well (or at all for that matter) with certain audiences. Lisa Sundstrom demonstrated this phenomenon in her work on Russian NGOs. Sundstrom found that NGO success rates differed depending on how they framed their issues, even among organizations that promoted identical policies. Soldier and Women's rights NGOs, for example, enjoyed far greater success when they framed their calls for reform in terms of the universal norms of physical abuse and deprivation than when they did so in terms of anti-militarism or discrimination, which were not universally accepted as norms.[xiv]

International Campaign to Ban Landmines

Consistent with Keck and Sikkink's arguments, the ICBL's framing of the landmine issue was an essential component of its success. Echoing Price, Charli Carpenter explains how the ICBL's ability to link the issue to "preexisting applicable moral standards" and grafting it "onto preexisting taboos" allowed for the issue to resonate well with policymakers.[xv] The norm that civilians were not to be targeted in war was already well established and landmines were a clear violation. Moreover, the idea that "guns don't kill people, people kill people" was not applicable in this case since landmines operate without human initiative.[xvi] By framing the issue according to the indiscriminate and cruel nature of mines, as chemical and biological weapons had been decades earlier, the ICBL effectively embedded the issue into the preexisting normative framework of civilian immunity and had them outlawed.

What was phenomenal about the ICBL's accomplishments was the fact that they made "political what was previously unpolitical" and generated a new norm for landmine disarmament. [xvii] Price holds that "a norm exists when the dominant discourse shifts in such a way that puts opponents on the defensive or even relegates direct contestation of its central validity claims to the margins."[xviii]Landmines (and arms in general) were historically an issue discussed solely in military and security circles rather than in the political sphere.[xix] By framing the issue in terms of the universal norm of unjustifiable harm to innocent civilians and refraining from promoting their agenda in what were presumed to be unsupportive 'venues' such as NATO, the ICBL created a window through which non-military actors could legitimately discuss landmines and place the subject on the activist agenda.[xx] The onus was now on the security community to prove that landmines were militarily necessary and possessed benefits that outweighed their costs –a burden of proof that was eventually found too heavy to carry.

Persuasive Politics

As mentioned previously, TANs engage in the strategic use of information to persuade more 'powerful' actors to adopt certain policies. In this regard, they use persuasive politics to socialize states and policymakers to act in

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accordance with norms such as human rights. Keck and Sikkink point out that once persuasive politics begin to have an effect, perceived state interests become increasingly aligned, which can lead to 'norm convergence' across state borders.[xxi]   Richard Price coins this process 'moral persuasion', which is essentially social pressure imposed by TANs on other actors since they are "otherwise underpowered agents of change."[xxii] Keck and Sikkink's model offers a typology for how persuasive politics are generally carried out. They divide the overall strategy into information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics. Each one will now be examined in turn and will be paralleled with how the ICBL conducted its campaign.

Information Politics

The Model

Once TANs adopt certain issues and succeed in framing those issues to resonate well with the international community, the door is open for them to begin the process of persuasion through information politics. Information politics seeks to generate greater public awareness of an issue through generating and disseminating information in strategic ways.[xxiii] The purpose of this tactic is to educate the pubic to understand "that a given state of affairs is neither natural nor accidental" and as such can be rectified.[xxiv] Moreover, they seek to generate and spread information identifying the parties responsible for certain crises, as well as what credible solutions are available. TANs hope that this increased knowledge will persuade people to take action.

Keck and Sikkink explain that in today's globalizing world, TANs are valued as reliable sources of information for issues that would not otherwise be heard.[xxv] This is in large part due to the fact that TANs are increasingly perceived as experts in their respective fields. As such they are able to shape public perceptions of certain crises and generate normative and ideational changes.[xxvi] Price notes that once TANs attack certain policies, states perceive a need to publicly justify their positions, which "reverse[s] the burden of proof involved in contesting norms" and "legitim[ates] political space for change."[xxvii]

Even more important than creating impulses for states to justify themselves, however, are the changes that occur within states' perceptions of themselves as a result of information politics. Decision makers are "receptive to being taught what is appropriate or useful" and TANs can be influential in providing such knowledge. In such cases "both the problem and the solution are taught to governments, who come to see new practices as appropriate."[xxviii]

Keck and Sikkink point out that NGOs engaging in the successful use of information politics use their information in specific ways. For one, they maintain that a campaign must include both 'hard facts', such as statistics and figures, as well as personal testimony from affected individuals and that "linkage of the two is crucial."[xxix] In some cases, TANs may first determine what kind of information would be valuable, and then strategically seek out corresponding data and testimony.

Finally, TANs have a variety of methods to ensure that their information gets distributed to the widest audience possible. Primarily, they use inter-TAN networks and the media for this purpose. Both Inter-TAN networks and the media have been able to spread information across the globe thanks to the technological revolution and have become "essential partners" in disseminating knowledge.[xxx] Various tools, such as involving prominent individuals in campaigns or launching an advertising drive, can help generate further attention to the issues TANs hold dear and assist them in their international campaigns. As we shall see, the ICBL made use of all of these tools and successfully utilized information politics to change states' policies and perceptions.

International Campaign to Ban Landmines

The ICBL is an excellent example of how a TAN can use information politics to promote their agenda. Don Hubert explains how the essence of the campaign was to effectively demonstrate "that the human costs exacted by anti-personnel mines far outweighed their military utility."[xxxi] As Keck and Sikkink's model suggests, one of the ways they accomplished this was by linking hard statistical evidence with emotive personal stories. TANs conducted extensive research campaigns to find the numbers of people killed or maimed by landmines and discovered that they

killed or severely injured up to 26,000 civilians *per annum*.[xxxii] Chilling numbers, such as the fact that 1/236 Cambodians are missing a limb compared to 1/22,000 Americans, were coupled with extensive campaigns featuring moving personal stories by the victims themselves, which added a human face to the statistical data. The symbiotic relationship between facts and individual narratives served to highlight the severity of the problem and inspire decision makers and the general public alike to demand real change.

To gain legitimacy and credibility, the ICBL co-opted military specialists to join in their campaign. Hubert explains how many of the activists had years of experience dealing with mines and were noted authorities on the issue, often including victims themselves.[xxxiii] Similarly, Price notes how anti-mine activists commissioned expert analyses of the issue such as the study on the "Military Use and Effectiveness of Anti-personnel Mines" to demonstrate that mines "have usually had little or no effect on the outcome of hostilities" and "were not as indispensable nor even as useful as often assumed."[xxxiv] The "field-based origins" of the campaign enabled the ICBL to challenge the military in its own language and delegitimized many of security concerns advanced by states, which created the political space necessary to induce change.[xxxv]

Pro-ban activists coupled the use of expert opinion with an effective media campaign and were thereby able to draw wide attention to the humanitarian costs of landmines.[xxxvi] For one, they sent President Clinton an open letter stating the military ineffectiveness of landmines and had it signed by prominent military experts such as General Norman Shwartzkopf. They then published the same letter in popular news outlets such as the*New York Times* and *International Herald Tribune*.[xxxvii] They also secured the participation of celebrity peace activists such as Pope John Paul II, Princess Diana, the Dalai Lama, and Desmond Tutu, all of whom were able to draw further media attention to the issue and ensure that it would reach the widest audience possible.[xxxviii]

By disseminating information about the crisis, the ICBL was able to change state perceptions of the conflict. As mentioned previously, states are receptive to being taught what is appropriate and change their actions accordingly. As information spread about the human cost of landmines, state reporting practices shifted as well. Price offers the example of the US State Department that changed its estimate of civilians killed or injured by landmines from 150 per week in 1993 to more that 500 per week the following year.[xxxix] Price attributes this change to the increased awareness of the issue that was generated as a result of the successful use of information politics, which effectively showed landmines to be a global crisis in need of a solution.[xl]

Symbolic Politics

The Model

Another useful tactic of persuasive politics involves what Keck and Sikkink term 'symbolic politics'. In this strategy, TANs use symbolism, defined as "the ability to call upon symbols, actions or stories to make sense of a situation or claim," in order to add new meanings to various issues and to expand the support base around a given cause.[xli] Keck and Sikkink view symbolic politics as a framing device in which TANs identify "convincing explanations for powerful events" by linking various issues together to underscore the importance of an issue or cause. [xlii]

A good example of symbolic politics offered by Keck and Sikkink is the indigenous rights movement of the early 1990's. The movement gained increased attention during 1992 since that year marked the 500-year anniversary of Columbus' arrival to the 'new world'. This enabled activists to link their plight with that historic date to gain a larger platform from which to reach wider audiences. Evidence of their success include the awarding of the Nobel Peace Price to indigenous rights activist Rigoberta Menchu that same year. The awarding of the Nobel Prize was both an effect of the successful use of symbolic politics as well as a source of symbolic politics in its own right as it boosted the movement's momentum and highlighted its importance. This, in turn, may have contributed to the UN's declaration of an indigenous person's year in 1993, which served as another key example of symbolic politics.[xliii]

International Campaign to Ban Landmines

The ICBL was able to successfully utilize symbolic politics in innovative and powerful ways to achieve their goal. As

mentioned previously, the ICBL was able to shape public perceptions of the issue and frame it as a global crisis in need of an immediate solution. By highlighting the disastrous effects of mines, the ICBL was able to induce the Nobel Committee to recognize the causes importance and award the Nobel Peace Prize to ICBL leader Jody Williams on November 10, 1997. Like in the indigenous rights movement earlier that decade, the symbolic effect of this act had ripples far beyond the immediate award. In the months that followed, several key states unilaterally accepted the ICBL's call for abolishing mines as "resistance signaled outlier status" and "reputational pressures overcame their resistance to an immediate comprehensive ban."[xliv]

Another intriguing use of symbolic politics involved the ICBL's support for Jacob Selebi, South African Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, for the role of President of the Oslo Conference, which brought 122 states together to try to find a solution to the crisis. In addition to his credentials, his position had a symbolic meaning since South Africa had ended apartheid only a few years earlier and had gained new status as a symbol for change. For states reluctant to challenge the status quo and insistent that the international system was rigid and inflexible, Selebi may have offered a symbol that progress is both possible and desirable.

Leverage Politics

The Model

Leverage politics is an additional component of persuasive politics and is defined as "the ability to call upon powerful actors to affect a situation where weaker members of a network are unlikely to have influence."[xlv] In other words, TANs seek leverage to gain influence over more powerful actors. Keck and Sikkink point out that this leverage can either be material or moral.

Material leverage is linked to something of value such as economic concerns. Thus, for example, activist groups seeking to undermine certain repressive states can link human rights considerations with their domestic government's financial support of those regimes.[xlvi] Moral leverage, on the other hand, involves holding certain behaviors deemed unacceptable "up to the bright light of international scrutiny."[xlvii] The latter is often referred to as the "mobilization of shame," which, for states that value positive images of themselves, can lead to a change in practice. In this case, public opinion serves as the point of leverage TANs rely on to pressure decision makers to act morally. This tactic has widely been used in mobilizing corporations to adopt socially responsible practices after NGOs publicized evidence of labor injustices and environmentally unfriendly practices.[xlviii] As we shall see, it was this approach that enabled the ICBL to carry the weight that it did during its campaign.

International Campaign to Ban Landmines

The idea of leverage politics enables us to understand why many of the ICBL's aforementioned strategies were successful in shaping state behavior. In fact, Price singles out "the role of moral persuasion and the social pressure arising from [it]" as "particularly crucial" in understanding the ban on landmines.[xlix] To elaborate, once the use of information politics highlighted the severity of the problem and disseminated that knowledge to wide numbers of people, states interested in maintaining positive images of themselves could no longer actively support such a destructive practice as landmines. The consequence of the authoritative reports, public awareness programs, conferences, signature and media campaigns, videos, documentaries, peace awards and the like, delegitimated the use of landmines and made it such that governments were 'shamed' into supporting the ICBL's cause and the new norms it advanced. By putting the issue under public scrutiny and forming a "web of surveillance" around state activities to determine their compliance, the ICBL could leverage the moral power they exerted to induce norm adoption.[l]

As mentioned previously, these new norms were gradually institutionalized and failure to adhere to them could lead to a state being ostracized by the international community. [li] It also enabled governments wishing to leverage the moral weight of the issue to shed negative images of themselves and to improve their reputation. For example, Price notes how South Africa's decision to unilaterally institute a comprehensive ban on landmines "help[ed] that country establish a distinct and admirable international profile after decades of pariah status."[lii] As could be expected,

activists' moral leverage became progressively greater as more and more states adopted the ban.

A final way in which the ICBL was able to gain leverage was through the co-optation of international organizations. Constructing an effective relationship with other actors such as the ICRC and the UN enabled the ICBL to gain access to key information, exposure, and resources. Most importantly, perhaps, it offered increased credibility and pull vis-à-vis state actors. Public statements of support and solidarity from the Secretary General and UN agencies such as UNICEF and UNHCR that declared landmines to be a priority issue, legitimized the goals of the ICBL and leveraged their power to successfully influence decision makers.

Accountability Politics

The Model

TANs use accountability politics to change state behavior by focusing on the discursive positions of decision makers and holding them accountable for what they say. The goal is to get leaders to make public statements and then oblige them to act accordingly. The issue then does not become the more difficult task of getting states to change their policies, but rather simply keeping them to their word.[liii]

Keck and Sikkink note that policymakers will often rhetorically agree with TANs in an effort to divert criticisms, however, they frequently fail to follow through with action.[liv] TANs welcome these statements and see them as opportunities to induce further pressure on states to act on their promises.[lv] States who make discursive concessions are therefore even more vulnerable to attack by TANs and other actors than those who refuse to pay lip service to certain ideals. This pressure becomes even greater if TANs can convince states to sign certain agreements or codes of conduct, which TANs can then "use to expose the distance between discourse and practice."[lvi] Keck and Sikkink write that this "is embarrassing to many governments, who may try to save face by closing the distance."[lvii]

International Campaign to Ban Landmines

The ICBL understood that getting governments to actually change their practices would be a daunting task. For this reason, their first order of business was consciousness-raising and "encouraging countries to offer rhetorical support for the eventual banning of mines."[lviii] The ICBL accomplished this through hosting a series of conferences, which focused on simple issues that were "difficult to argue with, such as the indiscriminate nature of AP land mines."[lix] States were then constrained to shift their discursive positions and offer rhetorical support for the idea that mines caused unnecessary harm. Even the most reluctant states, such as the US and China, felt impelled to pay lip service to this idea.[lx] By verbally accepted the notion that there was a crisis, however, states were implying that "action was necessary."[lxi] This added further legitimacy to the ICBL's cause, thereby making it easier to shame non-compliance and generate norm adoption, "especially compared with a situation in which opponents simply reject as ridiculous the idea of an international ban."[lxii]

In accordance with what Keck and Sikkink suggest would happen, Richard Price notes how governments that offered verbal support for the ban were those most likely to be shamed. In fact, he writes that "because of the United States' rhetorical support for a ban, it [had] been the favorite target of the ICBL's campaign of shame."[lxiii] It is in this context that Price maintains that "even support that might seem largely rhetorical is important because it legitimizes the idea of a ban and the political space for pressure."[lxiv] Eager to maintain a favorable and credible reputation in the international arena, 148 states that had verbally agreed to the ban 'in principle', eventually signed the Ottawa Convention outlawing landmines once and for all.[lxv]

Conclusion

We have seen how one of the most successful transnational advocacy networks in history, the ICBL, successfully utilized many of the tactics outlined by Keck and Sikkink for how TANs can influence policies by international campaigning. The ways in which the ICBL framed its case and its ability to engage in persuasive politics demonstrate

that even though non-state actors may lack the coercive power enjoyed by states, their stockpile of non-coercive 'weapons' leaves them far from powerless. In the end, the ICBL was able to persuade 148 states to put an end to the production and use of landmines and achieved what all TANs hope to accomplish – a shift in the normative framework in which politics are practiced and a new law to back it up.

[i]Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1999). 'Transnational Advocacy Networks in International and Regional Politics', *International Social Science Journal* 51 (159). Hereafter: Keck and Sikkink (1999).

[ii] *Ibid*: pp. 92.

[iii] *Ibid*: pp. 95.

[iv] *Ibid*: pp. 89.

[v] *Ibid*

[vi] *Ibid.*

[vii] *Ibid.*

[viii] Keck and Sikkink (1999): pp. 90.

[ix] *Ibid*: pp. 95.

[x] *Ibid*: pp. 90.

[xi] Richard Price (1998) 'Reversing the gun sights: transnational civil society targets land mines', *International Organization* 52 (3). Hereafter: Price (1998).

[xii] Keck and Sikkink (1999): pp. 95.

[xiii] *Ibid.*

[xiv] Sundstrom (2005).

[xv] Charli Carpenter (2007) 'Studying issue (non)-adoption in transnational advocacy networks', *International Organization* 61 (3): pp. 645. Hereafter: Carpenter (2007).

[xvi] Price (1998): pp. 628.

[xvii] *Ibid*: pp. 622.

[xviii] *Ibid*: pp. 631.

[xix] *Ibid.*

[xx] *Ibid.*

[xxi] Keck and Sikkink (1999).

[xxii] Price (1998): pp. 616-617.

[xxiii] Keck and Sikkink (1999). See also Price (1998) and Carpenter (2007).

[xxiv] Keck and Sikkink (1999).

[xxv] *Ibid.*

[xxvi] Price (1998).

[xxvii] *Ibid*: pp. 617.

[xxviii] *Ibid*: pp. 621.

[xxix] Keck and Sikkink (1999): pp. 96.

[xxx] *Ibid*: pp. 95.

[xxxi] Hubert (2004): pp. 94.

[xxxii] *Ibid.*

[xxxiii] *Ibid.*

[xxxiv] Price (1998): pp. 632.

[xxxv] Hubert (2004): pp. 96.

[xxxvi] *Ibid.*

[xxxvii] *Ibid.*

[xxxviii] *Ibid.* See also Price (1998).

[xxxix] Price (1998).

[xl] *Ibid.*

[xli] Keck and Sikkink (1999): pp. 95.

[xlii] *Ibid*: pp. 96.

[xliii] *Ibid.*

[xliv] Price (1998): pp. 635.

[xlv] Keck and Sikkink (1999): pp. 95.

[xlvi] *Ibid.*

[xlvii] *Ibid*: pp. 97.

[xlviii] Ethan B. Kapstein, "The Corporate Ethics Crusade" Foreign Affairs (September / October 2001)

[xlix] Price (1998): pp. 616.

[l] *Ibid.* pp. 626.

[li] *Ibid.*

[lii] *Ibid*: pp. 634.

[liii] Keck and Sikkink (1999).

[liv] *Ibid.*

[lv] *Ibid.*

[lvi] *Ibid*: pp. 98.

[lvii] *Ibid.*

[lviii] Hubert (2004): pp. 98.

[lix] Price (1998): pp. 633.

[lx] *Ibid.*

[lxi] *Ibid*: pp. 631.

[lxii] *Ibid*: pp. 636.

[lxiii] *Ibid.*

[lxiv] *Ibid*: pp. 635.

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[lxv] Hubert (2004). Note: These figures are accurate as of September, 2000.

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