



**Society for  
International Development**  
Netherlands Chapter

**SID-NL Lecture Series 2011-2012**

**“The State in a Globalizing World.  
Problematic, yet indispensable”**



**Lecture: Towards multipolarity? New models for international cooperation**

On Monday 16 April 2012, William Savedoff, senior fellow at the Center for Global Development (CGD), presented his lecture ‘Towards multipolarity? New models for international cooperation’ in the 2011-2012 SID-NL Lecture Series, ‘The State in a Globalizing World’.

**Summary**

Savedoff explained that the CGD is a “Think Plus” Tank. The Think part is the research and the “Plus” part is to take seriously the notion that ideas do not turn into action without substantial investment. For example, economists have long recognised the idea that a binding contract to purchase vaccines for diseases common amongst the poor would stimulate research into these vaccines but this idea was never turned into reality. CGD convened a working group, negotiated a contract and facilitated the creation of the first ever Advance Market Commitment to purchase a vaccine (pneumococcal vaccine). It is an example of how CGD worked with a mixed group of governments, foundations, NGOs, universities, and international organisations to try to solve a particular problem. Savedoff argued that the most active forms of international cooperation today are similar to these kinds of efforts. They resemble mixed coalitions or opportunistic alliances much more than they resemble formal public policy within or among nation-states.

Global government versus mixed coalitions

He then distinguished two different paradigms for international cooperation: the “global government” paradigm and the “mixed coalition” paradigm. International cooperation that follows a “global government” paradigm models its organisations, procedures and actions on the typical form of a modern nation-state. The logic of such an approach is to use the authority and legitimacy of government to establish rules and actions that are binding on member states. Examples of international organisations or systems under this paradigm are the UN system, the IMF and the World Health Organization. International cooperation that follows a “mixed coalition” paradigm is quite different. It does not require unanimity. Instead, it is more fluid, assembling interested parties – which may include some nation-states but also NGOs, private foundations, for-profit firms, civil society groups – around specific initiatives. A good example of a mixed coalition would be the International Campaign to End Landmines.

Multipolarity and mixed coalitions are not new

Savedoff argued that the multipolar world we live in, with its proliferation of mixed forms of international cooperation, is not new. Rather the world of 1945-1990 was the aberration. World history before WWII is actually full of mixed coalitions that were the norm for more than a century. In the 19th century, while nation-states were fighting wars of conquest, civil society was spawning international scientific societies, labour unions, temperance societies,

women's suffrage movements, and abolitionist campaigns. For example, public health was promoted by social campaigners and scientists, eventually adopted by national authorities but also in formal international sanitary bureaus. In each case, the process leading to international collective action was better characterised as a mixed coalition than the action of established global governmental institutions. After World War I, the mixed coalition paradigm was joined by the rise of a new actor – corporate philanthropies. The Rockefeller Foundation – which in relative size was the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation of its era – played an important role in promoting global health and financed as much as one-half of the League of Nations Health Office budget between the wars.

After World War II, the global government paradigm got its biggest boost. One of the reasons for this was the large imbalance in power between nations allowed the United States and Western Europe to promote international organisations. This served to generate an explosion of new institutions for global governance such as the UN Assembly structure, the World Bank and the World Health Organization. Savedoff argued that, in many ways, what we are seeing today is a return to the multi-polar world we once knew and which was eclipsed by the rapid economic growth and military power of Western Europe and the United States in the 20th century.

#### What is the future of international cooperation?

According to Savedoff, the future of international cooperation is a future of mixed coalitions. Mixed coalitions are promising because they are agile and can pull on a broader range of resources, including the rapid innovations in information and technology. The people, NGOs, foundations, agencies and countries that want to take action, get together and move. These mixed coalitions can also be responsive to feedback and they will only persist to the extent that members remain committed and find resonance with others.

Savedoff noted that mixed coalitions also face checks and balances; they have to prove themselves in the marketplace of ideas. These points about feedback and limitations are important because all mixed coalitions are not necessarily good. For example, there are organisations that launch international campaigns to promote discriminatory laws that repress women. Perhaps the most promising thing of all about mixed coalitions is that they are part of a global conversation on acceptable social norms and standards: Is it acceptable to allow people to die in famines? Or to pollute the oceans? He argued that mixed coalitions are effective precisely when they move these kinds of debates forward, resulting in slow but persistent improvements in global norms.

At the same time, he acknowledged that mixed coalitions are highly problematic. He argued that we do need global government institutions in the sense of unanimous binding action. We need them for certain kinds of issues that involve irreversible damage. For example, in health one of those issues that cannot wait is antibiotic resistance. We need to regulate and have appropriate prescription of antibiotics. If not, then ten or twenty years from now we could have a number of infectious diseases that can no longer be controlled. He further argued that climate change is perhaps the biggest challenge and most problematic failure of the global government paradigm. Instead of a global government approach, people are looking for ways to mobilise mixed coalitions. Important countries and



sub-national regions (e.g. California) are proceeding with cap and trade markets. One of his colleagues, David Wheeler, has proposed that states and provinces could even implement carbon sales taxes to discourage consumption of high carbon-footprint goods and services.

Savedoff concluded that he remains optimistic that our complex mix of global governance and mixed coalitions will eventually resolve the many challenges that require international cooperation. But it is not an optimism based on any deterministic trend. Rather it is an optimism that comes from reading historical accounts about the “end of the world” and realising that, at least so far, we have survived and even progressed.

## Discussion

Evelijne Bruning, director of The Hunger Project, started the discussion by posing a question to the audience: How can we make mixed coalitions more accountable without diminishing their agility?



A member of the audience responded that we have to distinguish crisis mode from stability mode. In crisis mode there is no time for accountability, to consult or respond to feedback. Then, for mixed coalitions it would be difficult to find the same type of accountability whilst keeping their flexibility to respond to a crisis. Another member asked why a mixed coalition is necessarily less accountable than an intergovernmental structure? A mixed coalition is agile and focuses on one issue. In this, they might even be more accountable because they want to achieve a result. Most institutions persist whether the issues they address are resolved or not. Then the question becomes, how to make coalitions more representative?

Savedoff responded that global government institutions and mixed coalitions are accountable in different ways and to different entities. International government institutions partly derive their legitimacy from the states by which they were created, and partly because of a unanimous procedural approach. Also, there are organisations such as the WHO and the IMF that claim legitimacy because of their technical expertise. Savedoff argued that it is the bureaucratic effectiveness of these organisations that leads to undermining their legitimacy. For example, the WHO reacted very rapidly when the SARS virus outbreak first occurred. However it did not respond well to AIDS. Instead, the world responded by creating UNAIDS. Then the question on global government institutions is maybe less about their accountability, but more about their ability to show that they are effective.

Then someone from the audience commented that perhaps one option might be to see whether we can find room within existing organisations for coalitions of the willing. Is there really a strict divide between global governance and mixed coalitions? For example, within the EU there are coalitions of the willing on the Euro. Savedoff argued that most of the successful mixed coalitions ultimately engage governments or multilateral institutions. They are not operating independently, but the relationships are highly complex. He then concluded that mixed coalitions, by pressuring for particular issues, might become the channel that gets global government institutions to function better.