

Willing?

A Militarily Limited Coalition

By Col. Dan Smith (Ret.) | March 19, 2003

For weeks, the Bush administration has claimed it has many partners in its anti-Iraq “coalition of the willing.” But until recently it repeatedly declined to name those on the list or to indicate the contribution each is making to the effort.

This reluctance is understandable on many counts. Some governments are wary of the adverse reaction that might manifest itself among their peoples from any revelation of significant support for the U.S. war effort. By not showing its hand, Washington has been able to maintain psychological pressure on undecided states who will want to be counted as part of the winning team once the fighting stops. And just possibly, the White House might be embarrassed by the paucity of militarily significant support from its coalition partners.

The Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) noted in a late February, 2003 report that Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage claimed that 21 countries had granted access rights and another 20 overflight rights. Culling through world media reports, IPS identified 34 of these 41 countries, which they listed in their report, *Coalition of the Willing or Coalition of the Coerced?*

On Tuesday March 18th, the State Department released a list of 30 countries willing to be named as part of the coalition, and claimed the support of “another 15 or so.” Those named were: Afghanistan, Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Uzbekistan.

The countries named by the State Department that are not on the list compiled by IPS are: Afghanistan, Colombia, El Salvador, Eritrea, Iceland, South Korea, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, and Uzbekistan. These nine, together with the IPS-identified 34, total 43 countries. Germany, which reportedly has sent a

small support detachment to the Gulf, would be the 44th coalition participant.

Forty-four of the world’s 197 countries is more than 20%, a not totally inconsequential number. But in the absence of substantial troop commitments, geography comes in to play as a determinant of the significance of any “contribution” to the coalition. And with diplomacy declared dead by the White House, all that counts now is what a country adds militarily.

None of the new nine are believed to be sending troop units; indeed, two—Afghanistan and Colombia—have major internal security problems, Eritrea has just emerged from a devastating war with Ethiopia, and South Korea is confronting a suddenly very belligerent North Korea. Moreover, all of the new nine lie outside transit zones for U.S. forces heading to the Gulf.

Only two countries have committed forces in any number: Great Britain (40,000) and Australia (2,000). The Czech Republic and Bulgaria have sent chemical and biological defense units of about 150 personnel each, although when given the opportunity to return home, some Czech troops opted to do just that.

All the Gulf Cooperation Council countries—Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman—either host U.S. forces or have allowed pre-positioning of equipment.

Turkey’s stance may be shifting from refusing to permit U.S. ground troops to transit its territory to launch a northern front against Iraq. But what the Bush administration really wants is overflight rights. Otherwise, to reach Iraq from the Mediterranean Sea, planes and missiles would have to transit Israeli (which might be a further inducement to Saddam



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Hussein to attack Israel) and Jordanian airspace. Jordan is already, though nervously, allowing U.S. Special Forces to operate from its territory.

The NATO allies are a mixed lot. Contributions from Britain, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria have been noted, as has Turkey's current indecision. Spain has en route naval and air bases that transiting U.S. forces could use, but along with Portugal, Madrid has declined to commit troops.

Many other NATO countries and candidate countries identified as coalition partners are not known to be troop contributors and are geographically remote from the routes used to flow troops and materiel into the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf. Thus their contributions would be militarily insignificant. These countries include: Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia.

Citing its status as a neutral, Austria barred both land transit and use of its airspace to U.S. troops wanting to move from Germany to Italy for embarkation to the war zone. This effectively removed Italy, a strong U.S. supporter, from any meaningful contribution (it, like Spain, offered no military forces), although it will obviously not restrict deployment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade from Vicenza. Austria's move, together with Greece's opposition to the war, geographically boxed NATO candidate countries Croatia and Slovenia—as well as the former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia and

Albania—from any role in helping to transit U.S. forces based in Germany.

Finally, there are the (again) geographically removed Central and East Asian countries—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Japan, Philippines.

In sum, from information available as of mid-March, the type of military support that can be expected from the 44 countries on the combined list are:

troop unit contributors:	5
bases/transit facilities	12 (including Italy and Turkey)
no significant military contribution:	27

Suddenly, the world-wide “coalition of the willing” doesn't seem so large or so global.

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FOR MORE SEE:

Coalition of the Willing or Coalition of the Coerced?
<http://www.ips-dc.org/coalition.htm>

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