

Banning the bomb: a global history of activism against nuclear weapons



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First published 2024.

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Introduction and guidance

Introduction

Nuclear weapons have been used in war twice, when the Americans dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 at the end of the Second World War, and more than 2,000 times in nuclear tests. The scale of destruction brought about by these weapons, and the rapid increase in both the number and the power of nuclear weapons in the following years, has prompted deep fears about their potential future use. While the end of the Cold War offered brief relief from such anxieties, in recent years, more countries have developed nuclear weapons and today nine nuclear weapons states are modernising their arsenals. With Russian President Vladimir Putin's repeated threats of nuclear conflict since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, among other nuclear-armed threats, the potential use of nuclear weapons seems greater now than at any point since the Cold War.

In this free course you will learn about the global anti-nuclear movement that has worked for decades to prevent the use of nuclear weapons, with the ultimate aim of abolishing them altogether. You will see how opposition to nuclear weapons has been an important cause on every continent. Beginning in 1945, this course will equip you with knowledge of the nature of anti-nuclear activism until the present day.

Since 1945, the issue of nuclear weapons has mobilised citizens from a broad range of backgrounds from around the world. Churches and other religious organisations, trade unions and political parties have played a significant role in opposing nuclear armaments. From the 1950s onwards, environmental and feminist groups have also been central actors. Those with specific expertise, including scientists, academics and physicians, have also been instrumental. Indeed, policymakers, politicians and even world leaders can be counted among anti-nuclear activists. The very diversity of the movement highlights that *anyone* can be an activist and can work to oppose nuclear weapons.

The course is divided into six sessions, and each session should take you around one hour to complete.

In Session 1, you'll learn about the destructive capabilities of nuclear weapons and why people have mobilised against them.

In Session 2, you'll see what forms of activism citizens have engaged in to oppose nuclear weapons.

In Session 3, you'll learn how activists have cooperated across national borders to work for a world free of nuclear weapons.

In Session 4, you'll explore how different governments have responded to anti-nuclear activism.

In Session 5, you'll assess the impact of anti-nuclear activism and see what changes have been brought about by citizens mobilising against nuclear weapons.

In Session 6, you'll learn more about the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), one of the most important and most successful anti-nuclear campaigns in the world today.

This course has been produced as part of an AHRC-funded project on 'Global histories of anti-nuclear activism', with nine partner institutions in seven countries across five

continents. This course was produced collaboratively by The Open University and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), winner of the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize.



Before you get started we would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about your expectations for this course, in our optional [start-of-course survey](#). Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass your details onto others.

Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- understand the different forms of activism used to oppose nuclear weapons since 1945
- learn how anti-nuclear activism has different in different countries and regions
- navigate newly digitised primary sources to gain a deeper understanding of anti-nuclear activism.

Moving around the course

In the 'Summary' at the end of each session, you will find a link to the next one. If at any time you want to return to the start of the course, click on 'Full course description'. From here you can navigate to any part of the course. Alternatively, use the week links at the top of every page of the course.

It's also good practice, if you access a link from within a course page to open it in a new window or tab. That way you can easily return to where you've come from without having to use the back button on your browser.

You can now go to [Session 1](#).

Session 1: Why do people oppose nuclear weapons?

Introduction

In this session, you'll explore why citizens around the world have opposed and continue to oppose nuclear weapons.

You'll hear from a survivor of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima, before exploring the impact of the development and testing of nuclear weapons, as well as the budgetary implications of producing nuclear weapons.

Before you get started we would really appreciate a few minutes of your time to tell us about your expectations for this course, in our optional [start-of-course survey](#). Participation will be completely confidential and we will not pass your details onto others.

1 The horrors of nuclear



Figure 1 Hiroshima after the atomic bombing of 6 August 1945. Virtually all the buildings in central Hiroshima were destroyed; the surviving building on the right is now the Hiroshima Peace Memorial.

Nuclear weapons have been used in war on two occasions. On 6 August 1945, during the Second World War, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, destroying the city and killing an estimated 100,000 to 140,000 people, the vast majority of whom were civilians. This was followed by a second nuclear attack on the city of Nagasaki on 9 August 1945, which killed an estimated 40,000 to 80,000 people. While the Second World War had seen large-scale bombing campaigns targeting civilians, the sheer scale of destruction unleashed by a single bomb on each occasion showed that nuclear weapons were categorically different from conventional bombs.

Survivors of these two nuclear attacks are known as hibakusha. Their first-hand experiences of witnessing and surviving the devastation caused by nuclear weapons are unique, and an invaluable resource for understanding the horrors of nuclear war. By sharing their stories and working to ensure nuclear weapons are never used again, the hibakusha have been among the most important actors in the global anti-nuclear movement.

Activity 1

Listen to the recording of Keiko Ogura, a hibakusha who was just eight years old when an atomic bomb was dropped on her city, Hiroshima. Then answer the questions below.

Audio content is not available in this format.



1. How did Keiko Ogura survive the atomic bombing?
2. What part of her description of the bombing did you find most striking?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Keiko Ogura did not go to school on 6 August, as there had been an air raid siren the previous evening. The students who did go to her school, which was closer to where the bomb was dropped, were killed by the blast.

2. There is no single correct answer to this question. Keiko Ogura describes how the city was destroyed and was burning, how injured survivors had to be left behind, and how following the attack the city was covered by a black, radioactive rain. Her description provides a moving, first-hand account of the effects of nuclear weapons.

As devastating as the destruction witnessed on 6 and 9 August was, these nuclear attacks caused many further victims over the following months and years. The levels of radiation unleashed by the bombs caused radiation sickness, cancer, leukaemia, and other fatal illnesses among survivors. Among them was Sadako Sasaki, who was just two years old when she survived the nuclear attack on Hiroshima. She later developed leukaemia as a result of the radiation from the bomb and died at the age of 12. In hospital, she folded origami paper cranes (orizuru), which have since become a symbol of peace.

The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were among the very first nuclear weapons ever made. Since 1945, the power of nuclear weapons has increased dramatically. In 1954, the Americans tested a nuclear weapon at Bikini Atoll in the South Pacific that was roughly one thousand times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima just nine years earlier. As devastating as the nuclear attacks of 1945 were, nuclear weapons today would be vastly more destructive.

2 The impact of nuclear weapons development



Figure 2 A British nuclear test carried out at Maralinga, Australia, in 1956. The blast pictured here was roughly one thousand times more powerful than that of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945.

While the actual use of nuclear weapons in warfare causes untold destruction, the development of nuclear weapons has also had severe consequences for many communities. Uranium mining, essential for gathering the raw materials required to produce some types of nuclear weapons, exposes miners to exceptionally high levels of radiation, which has resulted in untold numbers of illness and deaths. The uranium used in the bomb dropped on Hiroshima came from mines as far afield as Congo and Canada, with the mining carried out by indigenous people who subsequently suffered from a range of health issues.

The testing of nuclear weapons has also affected millions of individuals around the world. Nuclear fallout and dangerously high radiation levels emanating from nuclear tests affect individuals at the time of the tests and contaminate the areas for years afterwards.

Activity 2

Watch this video of Ibba Bobaker, who represents those affected by French nuclear tests carried out in Algeria between 1961 and 1966. Then answer the question below.

Video content is not available in this format.



1. What were some of the consequences of the French nuclear testing in Algeria on the communities living there?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. The nuclear tests contaminated the region with unsafe levels of radiation. This has led to serious illnesses such as cancer and leukaemia within the community.

Activity 3

Look at the map below, showing the location of nuclear explosions between 1945 and 2017, then answer the questions below.

Nuclear weapons explosions 1945 to 2017

Location and quantity of nuclear weapons explosions (tests and attacks)

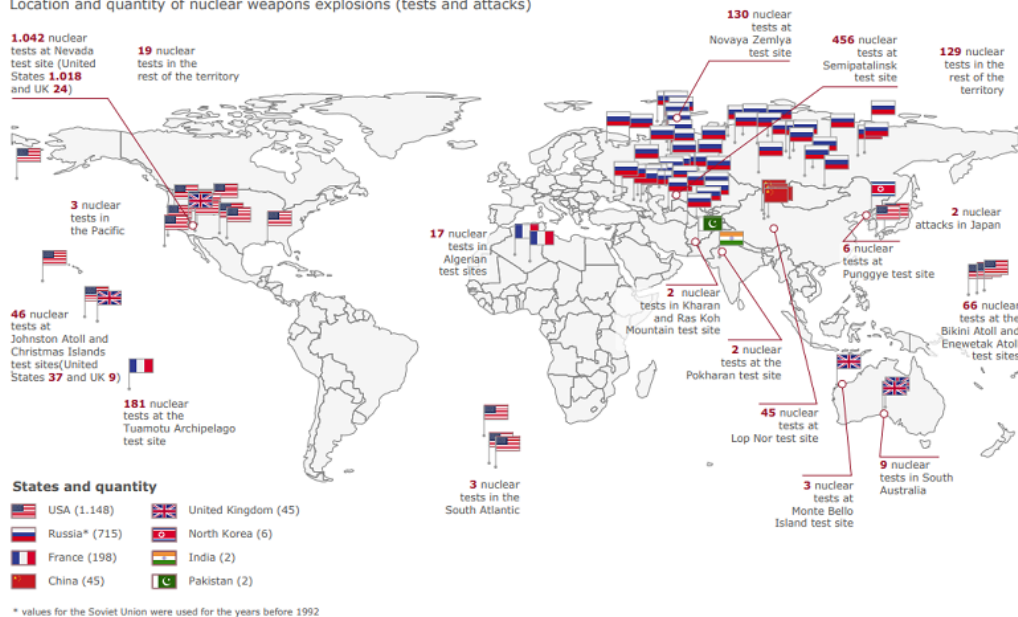


Figure 3 Map showing where the thousands of nuclear weapons explosions since 1945 have taken place in the world. Along with Israel, the eight countries listed here make up the nine nuclear weapons states in the world today.

1. Which countries are responsible for most of the nuclear explosions since 1945?
2. What strikes you most about the location of these nuclear explosions?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. The United States and Russia/the Soviet Union account for the vast majority of nuclear explosions since 1945. Today, these two countries have by far the largest arsenals of nuclear weapons.
2. There are a number of different things that may have struck you looking at this map. You may have remarked on the geographical spread of nuclear explosions, with South America being the only continent where nuclear weapons have not been detonated. You may also have noticed that, outside of Russia, there have been no nuclear explosions in Europe, as the UK and France have tested their nuclear weapons elsewhere, particularly in the Pacific. The map also shows how some specific sites have been subjected to numerous nuclear explosions, which have exposed local populations to extreme and sustained levels of radiation.

Nuclear tests have often been carried out in areas populated by marginal or indigenous communities. While French nuclear tests were carried out in the Sahara Desert in Algeria and then in French Polynesia, the British conducted nuclear tests in Australia, affecting indigenous communities there. In China, nuclear tests have been carried out in Xinjiang

(at the Lop Nor test site), affecting the Uighur population disproportionately, while Soviet nuclear tests in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan and American tests in Nevada and the Marshall Islands similarly affected marginalised communities. Clearly, even though only two nuclear weapons have been used in warfare, their development and testing has had devastating effects on individuals and communities.

3 The cost of nuclear weapons

Beyond the direct impact of nuclear weapons on individuals, a further reason why many people oppose these weapons is their astronomical cost. In 2023, the nine nuclear-armed countries in the world spent a staggering \$91 billion (USD) on nuclear weapons – or \$173,884 every minute. At a time when many national governments are facing budgetary pressures, these sums spent on nuclear weapons represent billions of dollars of public funds that could otherwise be diverted to areas such as healthcare and education.

Table 1 The spending on nuclear weapons for the year 2023

Country	Amount spent on nuclear weapons in 2023 (in USD)
United States	\$51.5 billion
China	\$11.9 billion
Russia	\$8.3 billion
United Kingdom	\$8.1 billion
France	\$6.1 billion
India	\$2.7 billion
Israel	\$1.1 billion
Pakistan	\$1 billion
North Korea	\$856 million
TOTAL	\$91.4 billion

(ICAN, 2024, p. 11)

4 Summary of Session 1

In this session, you have explored some of the reasons why individuals may choose to oppose nuclear weapons. The horrors of nuclear war, as witnessed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are central to motivating anti-nuclear activism. The impact of nuclear weapons development and testing, which has disproportionately affected marginalised and indigenous communities, is a further factor. Finally, you learned about the economic costs of nuclear weapons, and how this is a further argument against them.

Having learned why individuals might choose to oppose nuclear weapons, you'll now move on to the next session, where you'll explore what types of action anti-nuclear activists have taken.

You can now go to [Session 2](#).

Session 2: How have citizens mobilised against nuclear weapons?

Introduction

In this session, you'll learn about how citizens have mobilised against nuclear weapons since 1945.

First, you'll see how anti-nuclear activism developed in the years following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Next, you'll explore one of the most intense periods of anti-nuclear activism in the UK and elsewhere in Europe in the early 1980s. Then you'll learn more about nuclear colonialism and how in many parts of the world, such as Polynesia, opposition to nuclear weapons has been closely related to calls for greater national independence.

1 Anti-nuclear activism after 1945

Activism against nuclear weapons began soon after the end of the Second World War, as details became more widely known of the devastation caused by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Further impetus was provided by nuclear testing in the Pacific region. In 1954, an American nuclear test at Bikini Atoll caused the crew of a Japanese fishing boat, the Lucky Dragon, to suffer radiation poisoning, resulting in the death of one sailor. This brought attention to the dangers posed by nuclear weapons testing, as nuclear fallout affected those living in the regions destined to be test grounds, with indigenous communities being particularly affected. This led to what is sometimes known as the first wave of anti-nuclear activism, as citizens in the Pacific and around the world mobilised against nuclear weapons testing. This included public demonstrations, such as peace marches, as well as coordinated letter-writing and lobbying campaigns to influence policymakers.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, in which the United States and the Soviet Union came close to triggering a nuclear war, further raised public awareness of the dangers of nuclear weapons. In 1963, this led to the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty by the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, which banned testing nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, under water, or in outer space. In much of the world, this arms control breakthrough, followed by a period of increased dialogue and cooperation between the opposing sides in the Cold War known as *détente*, resulted in a reduction in anti-nuclear activity by the late 1960s.



Figure 1 A march organised by the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in 1962. From 1958, the CND organised annual marches at Easter from Aldermaston, Berkshire (where the UK's Atomic Weapons Research Establishment was located) to London.

2 The Euromissile Crisis and anti-nuclear activism in the UK in the early 1980s

A second and even larger wave of anti-nuclear activism emerged in the late 1970s and peaked in the early 1980s. In Western Europe, this was chiefly triggered by the 1979 decision by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to deploy hundreds of new American nuclear weapons in five Western European countries: the Federal Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium. Opposition to the deployment of these 'Euromissiles' surged in the early 1980s, as citizens feared such an escalation in the nuclear arms race would make nuclear war more likely.



Figure 2 A demonstration in Bonn, then capital of the Federal Republic of Germany, in October 1981 against the planned deployment of 'Euromissiles' in the country. This demonstration attracted roughly 300,000 participants, and similar demonstrations across Western Europe included comparable numbers of protesters.

Activity 1

Watch this video featuring activists, policymakers and historians discussing what forms of action took place in the UK during the 'Euromissile Crisis' of the early 1980s, then answer the questions below.

Video content is not available in this format.



WHAT FORMS OF PEACE ACTIVISM
TOOK PLACE IN THE UK?

1. What form did activism take in the UK in the early 1980s?
2. How did activism differ across the UK?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Perhaps the two most visible forms of anti-nuclear activism were large public demonstrations, such as those in Hyde Park or in Trafalgar Square in London, and the Women's Peace Camp set up at Greenham Common, one of the two military bases in the UK where the new 'Euromissiles' were to be deployed. Additional activities included letter-writing campaigns, public education and lobbying Members of Parliament.
2. In the UK, the focus of anti-nuclear activism in England and Wales was mainly on the Cruise missiles which were to be stationed in southern England. In Scotland, however, there was a greater emphasis on opposing the UK government's nuclear weapons systems – Polaris, and then Trident – which were deployed on submarines based at Clyde Naval Base, near Glasgow. These issues resonated differently in different parts of the UK, leading to more targeted local campaigns.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the emergence of new forms of anti-nuclear activism. Especially striking were 'die-ins', in which groups of activists would fall to the ground and play dead, drawing attention to the deadly effects of nuclear weapons. Another iconic form of action was peace camps, in which activists would remain at a particular site (often a military base where nuclear weapons were deployed) for months or years at a time. The Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in Berkshire, England, was established in 1981 and remained at the site until 2000. The period also saw massive anti-nuclear

demonstrations as well as less visible forms of activism such as letter-writing and public education campaigns.

The peace movement was a heterogeneous phenomenon encompassing a broad spectrum of autonomous activists and youth movements, but also institutions such as political parties, trade unions and churches. Beyond those involved in the anti-nuclear campaign in some way, popular culture reflected the pervasive anxieties of the very real possibility of a nuclear war that could lead to the end of humanity. Pop music from this period saw artists ranging from ABBA, Metallica, Queen, and Sting to Nena reflecting these fears of nuclear war in their lyrics. Nuclear weapons and the possibility of nuclear annihilation were a prominent topic in films, television, video games, comic books and board games. Along with the widespread anti-nuclear activism seen across many countries, these cultural outputs reveal just how ubiquitous fears of the dangers of nuclear weapons were during this period.

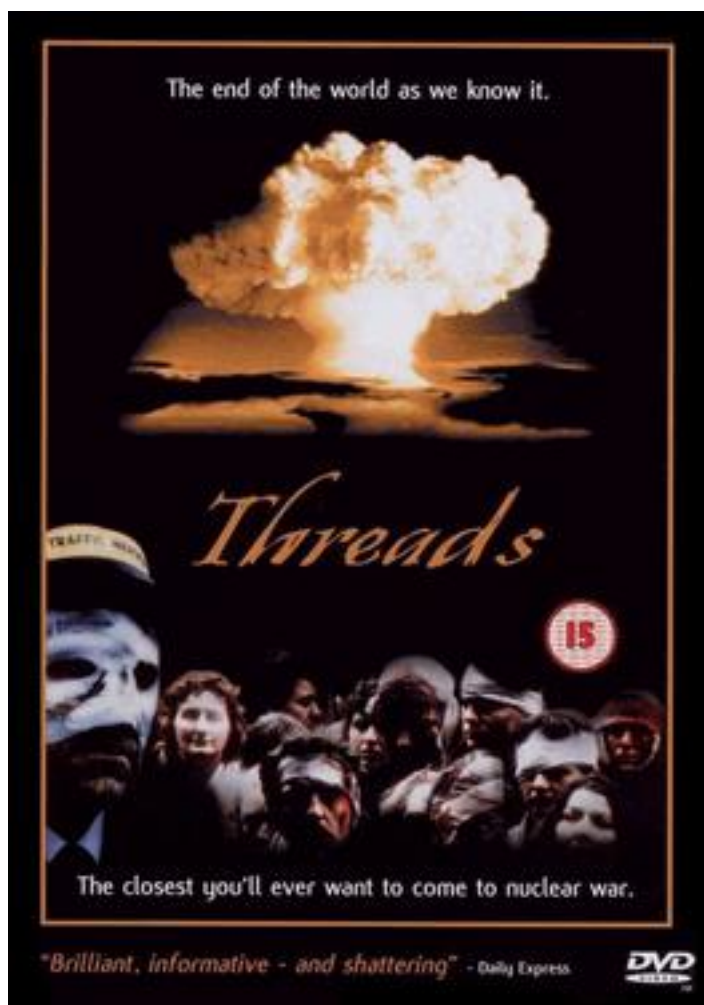


Figure 3 A poster advertising the BBC film *Threads*, produced in 1984. The film depicts the horrifying consequences of a nuclear attack on the British city of Sheffield.

In addition to fears that these new 'Euromissiles' would make nuclear war more likely, many citizens felt that the imposition of new American nuclear weapons on their country's soil undermined national sovereignty. As a result, anti-Americanism was often a feature of anti-nuclear protest in Europe in the early 1980s.

In the next section, you'll see how the themes of anti-nuclear activism and national sovereignty interacted in other parts of the world.

3 Nuclear colonialism: anti-nuclear activism and national independence

While anti-nuclear protests surged across much of Western Europe in the early 1980s, one country in the region was apparently immune from large-scale protests: France. One explanation for this lack of a large anti-nuclear movement in France is that the country was not being asked to deploy new nuclear weapons on its territory – unlike the UK or West Germany, for example. Equally importantly, France had (and has) its own nuclear weapons, which were championed by politicians across the political spectrum as a guarantor of France's national sovereignty. In other words, while the arrival of American nuclear weapons on British or German soil was seen by many to be a challenge to national sovereignty, the fact that the French state had its own nuclear deterrent was by contrast presented as a way of defending national sovereignty. While anti-nuclear activism certainly existed in France in the early 1980s, it never approached the scale of what was seen elsewhere in NATO at the time.

While metropolitan France saw relatively little anti-nuclear protest, another part of France saw an important rise in anti-nuclear activism in the early 1980s: French Polynesia, an overseas French territory.

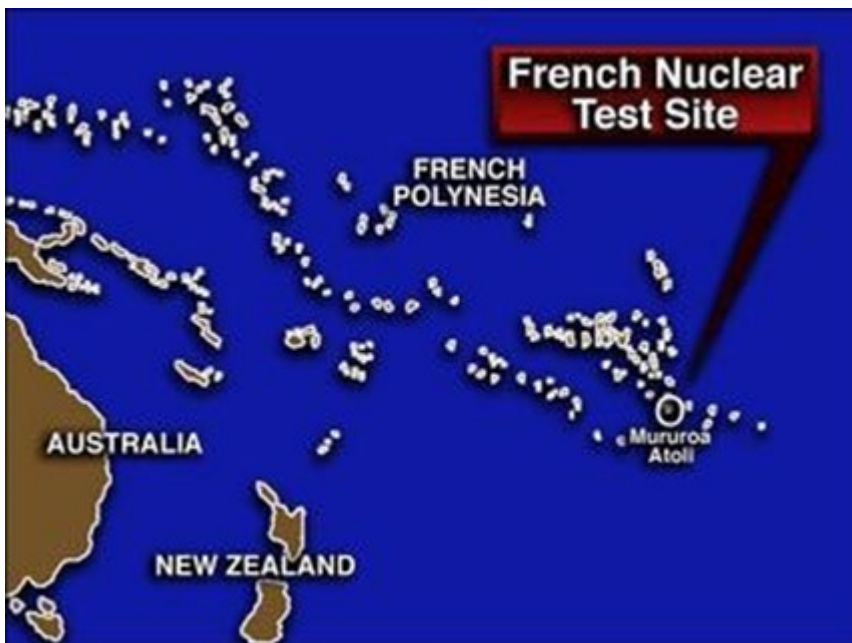


Figure 4 Map indicating the location of the French nuclear tests.

When it first developed its own nuclear weapons, France had conducted a series of nuclear tests in the Sahara Desert in Algeria. Following Algeria's independence in 1962, however, France sought a new testing site for its nuclear weapons and chose French Polynesia, specifically the Mururoa Atoll. France refused to join the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty and between 1966 and 1974 France conducted a series of atmospheric nuclear tests. From 1974 until 1996, it continued with underground nuclear tests, with at least 175 tests taking place in French Polynesia by 1996.

The impact of these tests is now well documented, and the nuclear fallout and increased radiation levels contaminated Polynesian populations of different atolls, as well as French soldiers stationed in French Polynesia. This is an example of nuclear colonialism, whereby a country with nuclear weapons tests these weapons in what is to them a peripheral territory, affecting marginalised and indigenous communities disproportio-

nately. So committed was the French Government to the tests that they authorised the sinking of an NGO ship, the Rainbow Warrior, which was protesting against the tests, killing one Greenpeace crew member.

These nuclear tests overseen by the French state mobilised anti-nuclear activism among Polynesians. In 1973, an estimated 5000 people marched against the nuclear tests. Given that the entire population of French Polynesia at the time was about 130,000, the number of activists corresponds to nearly 4 per cent of the total population. Importantly, anti-nuclear activists' demands to stop the nuclear testing was increasingly tied to growing calls for self-determination. By the early 1980s, the anti-nuclear cause was increasingly related to the anti-colonial one, with a peaceful and anti-nuclear dimension becoming a crucial part of Polynesian identity. However, while the question of Polynesian independence remained a divisive one, opposition to the nuclear tests became more widely shared among Polynesians.



Figure 5 This poster, produced in the early 1980s by the New Zealand-based Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, highlights the link between nuclear testing and national sovereignty.

While anti-nuclear activism in French Polynesia became linked to calls for greater national self-determination, the French nuclear tests also mobilised activists around the world, and indeed in metropolitan France. Campaigners across the South Pacific worked together to achieve the 1985 Treaty of Rarotonga, establishing the South Pacific as a nuclear

weapons free zone. In Session 3, you'll learn more about this kind of cross-border or transnational cooperation in opposing nuclear weapons.

4 Summary of Session 2

In this session, you learned about some of the different forms of action taken to oppose nuclear weapons. In the UK in the early 1980s, this included large-scale demonstrations and peace camps, as well as less visible forms such as letter-writing campaigns, public education, and lobbying politicians. You then explored anti-nuclear activism in French Polynesia, where nuclear tests were carried out from 1966 to 1996, and the merging of anti-nuclear and anti-colonial protests.

In the next session, you'll explore how activists have worked together across borders to oppose nuclear weapons.

You can now go to [Session 3](#).

Session 3: How have anti-nuclear activists cooperated across national boundaries?

Introduction

In this session, you'll explore examples of how anti-nuclear activism crosses national borders as activists cooperate to effect change. First, you'll learn about cross-country cooperation on a specific campaign, considering the Euromissile Crisis in Western Europe in the 1980s and how Western activists sought to engage with citizens on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Next, you'll explore the role of the hibakusha, survivors of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and how they have impacted anti-nuclear activism around the world. Finally, you'll learn about the World Campaign against South Africa's nuclear weapons during apartheid, and how this campaign took place internationally given that protest was curtailed within South Africa itself.

Taken together, these cases highlight how anti-nuclear activists have worked together beyond and across national boundaries in opposing nuclear weapons.

1 Transnational activism during the Euromissile Crisis

As you saw in Session 2, the planned deployment of new American nuclear weapons in five Western European countries in the early 1980s prompted citizens to come together to protest against what many considered to be an escalation that would make nuclear war more likely. While groups emerged at local or national levels, they often worked together across national boundaries, sharing best practices, publications, and inviting speakers from different countries. The Dutch Inter-Church Peace Council, for example, produced materials intended to be used by activists in other European countries as well to oppose nuclear weapons. Innovations in one place – for example, the creation of a women's peace camp in Greenham Common in Berkshire, England – inspired activists elsewhere, with peace camps springing up from Comiso, Sicily to Cold Lake, Alberta. This exchange of ideas across national boundaries has long been central to anti-nuclear activism.



Figure 1 Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, which inspired similar peace camps in many other countries.

In the early 1980s, two of the most important anti-nuclear organisations were the UK-based Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and European Nuclear Disarmament (END). While the former was a well-established organisation that had worked for the elimination of nuclear weapons in Britain since 1958, END was launched in the UK in the early 1980s and advocated cross-border cooperation across all of Europe to rid the continent of nuclear weapons. Both groups reached out to activists in other NATO member states in Western Europe and also to interlocutors on the other side of the Iron Curtain in the Soviet bloc.

Activity 1

In this video, activists from CND and END, as well as historians of this period, discuss how these British-based organisations worked across national boundaries to promote nuclear disarmament. Watch the video and then answer the question below.

Video content is not available in this format.



WAS UK PEACE ACTIVISM PART
OF A WORLDWIDE MOVEMENT?

1. How did anti-nuclear activists in Britain engage in dialogue with those in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during the Cold War?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. There were two main groups within the Soviet bloc with whom British anti-nuclear organisation engaged. On the one hand there were formal Peace Committees, which were effectively controlled by the ruling Communist Party in each country. On the other hand, there were dissidents, who were critical of the regimes in Eastern Europe. While these two groups were at odds with each other within the Eastern bloc, Western anti-nuclear activists engaged with both to work towards nuclear disarmament.

In the campaign against the 'Euromissiles', activists understood that working with partners in other countries was mutually beneficial and even essential to advance their cause. Despite the challenges in working with partners on the other side of the Iron Curtain, this dialogue proved to be vitally important, as you will see in Session 5.

2 The role of hibakusha as a global crossroads

Hibakusha – survivors of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki – have long played a vital role in raising awareness of the horrors of nuclear weapons. By sharing their first-hand experiences, hibakushas' voices provide a unique first-hand account, as you heard in Session 1. Hibakusha have also had an invaluable impact on anti-nuclear activism far beyond Japan. In 1975, for example, a group of hibakusha including Setsuko Thurlow organised an exhibition on the atomic bombings at the Toronto Public Library, which helped trigger the development of a significant anti-nuclear movement in Canada. In 1984, Takashi Morita co-founded a hibakusha organisation based in Sao Paulo to share the stories of hibakusha in Brazil and to raise awareness of the devastating consequences of nuclear weapons. Growing awareness of hibakushas' experiences also inspired Europeans protesting against Euromissiles to devise the campaign slogan 'no Euroshima!'.



Figure 2 An anti-nuclear activist in Bonn, Germany in 1981 with a sign declaring 'We do not want a Euroshima'.

While survivors from Hiroshima and Nagasaki have played an important part in shaping anti-nuclear activism around the world, the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have also become important sites of dialogue and education about nuclear issues. In recent years, representatives of communities harmed by nuclear weapons – particularly of indigenous communities disproportionately affected by nuclear tests – have travelled to Hiroshima to

participate in the annual Peace Memorial Day ceremony marking the anniversary of the 6 August 1945 bombing. This has become an important site for victims of nuclear testing to share their stories, highlighting how communities around the world have been adversely affected by nuclear weapons. Anti-nuclear activists from around the world also attend this annual ceremony, which has become a central meeting place for those working for a nuclear weapons-free world.

3 South Africa and the World Campaign

In September 1979, in what was known as the Vela Incident, it was suspected that a nuclear test took place in the South African territory of the Prince Edward Islands, providing evidence that the country was secretly developing nuclear weapons. During the apartheid era (1948–1994), however, anti-nuclear activism within South Africa was incredibly difficult, as the regime did not tolerate public demonstrations against the state or its (secret) nuclear weapons programme. One rare exception was a small protest organised in Cape Town in 1983. A group of five protesters wore gas masks and carried a fake coffin through Greenmarket Square to protest the construction of a nuclear power station in Koeberg, outside of Cape Town, partially due to fears that this would contribute to the regime's nuclear weapons programme. Within minutes, however, the demonstration was forcibly ended by the police and most participants arrested. Figure 3 shows this rare example of anti-nuclear protest within South Africa.



Figure 3 An anti-nuclear protest in Greenmarket Square, Cape Town, 1983.

Given the challenges of anti-nuclear activism within the country, international and transnational activism became crucial to opposing South Africa's nuclear weapons programme. Significant activism against the apartheid regime took place internationally, and so too did activism against the regime's nuclear weapons.

The Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) was an organisation created in 1959 to oppose South Africa's racist regime. In 1979, the AAM launched the World Campaign Against Military and Nuclear Collaboration with South Africa, which worked with partners around the world to dissuade governments from providing South Africa with weapons or technologies that could be used for its nuclear weapons programme. It also ran a targeted campaign against what it called 'the apartheid bomb', seeking to raise awareness and to mobilise international action against Pretoria.

Activity 2

Watch this extract of a speech by interview with Abdul Minty, who set up and led the World Campaign Against Military and Nuclear Collaboration with South Africa. In this speech, recorded in 2023, he explains his activities in the aftermath of the 1979 Vela Incident. Then answer the questions below.

Video content is not available in this format.



1. What did the World Campaign do with the information it received regarding South African military and nuclear activities?
2. According to Minty, why was an arms embargo so important?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. The World Campaign received numerous reports of various military and nuclear developments in South Africa. Yet many of these were false, and some were even planted by those hostile to the Anti-Apartheid Movement's work. Minty and his colleagues had to assess each claim and only publicise accounts that they believed to be true. Ultimately, this proved successful, and the World Campaign was able to build up considerable credibility by revealing developments which proved to be accurate while avoiding making false claims.
2. The apartheid regime rested on police and military force, making its defence budget unsustainably large. Minty argued that if an effective arms embargo against South Africa were implemented, the apartheid regime itself would collapse. As this embargo was put in place increasingly effectively in the 1980s, Minty argues this resulted in the end of the apartheid regime and the transition to democracy in South Africa in the 1990s.

As part of the World Campaign, the AAM collaborated with national anti-nuclear organisations to oppose South Africa's nuclear weapons. In the UK, the CND, which was mainly focused on preventing the deployment of Cruise missiles in the country and the government's acquisition of the Trident system, organised joint events with the AAM and

the World Campaign against the 'apartheid bomb'. You can see a poster from one such event, organised in Exeter, England, in 1982, in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Poster advertising an event co-organised by the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the CND in Exeter, England, in June 1982.

The World Campaign continued its work throughout the 1980s. In 1989, the South African leader F.W. de Klerk cancelled the country's nuclear weapons programme. South Africa became the first – and to date the only – country to have developed its own nuclear weapons and then to unilaterally dismantle them. Since then, successive South African governments have been active in supporting nuclear disarmament, playing a key role in establishing the African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (also known as the Treaty of Pelindaba) in 1996, and signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) in 2017.

4 Summary of Session 3

In this session, you have explored some of the ways in which anti-nuclear activism cuts across national borders. During the Euromissile Crisis of the early 1980s, Western activists sought interlocutors on the other side of the Iron Curtain to work towards the abolition of nuclear weapons in Europe. You then learned about the important global role of the hibakusha in raising awareness of the dangers of nuclear weapons and how Hiroshima has become an important global crossroads for victims of nuclear technologies. Finally, looking at the case of South Africa, you examined how anti-nuclear activists unable to protest within the country mounted a World Campaign to end the 'apartheid bomb', and how South Africa ultimately dismantled its nuclear weapons unilaterally and became an important champion for nuclear disarmament on the world stage.

In the next session, you will explore some of the different ways in which governments have responded to, and engaged with, anti-nuclear activism.

You can now go to [Session 4](#).

Session 4: How have governments responded to anti-nuclear activism?

Introduction

Since 1945, anti-nuclear activists and organisations have emerged as important non-state actors in the struggle against nuclear weapons. One of the central aims of anti-nuclear activism has been to effect meaningful changes in the policies of national governments, where decisions concerning nuclear weapons are generally made.

In this session, you'll learn how different national governments have responded to anti-nuclear activists, with stances ranging from adversarial to cooperative.

1 Opposing anti-nuclear activism

In many countries, particularly under non-democratic regimes, mounting anti-nuclear activism was incredibly difficult, if not impossible. In Session 3 you saw how the obstacles to opposing nuclear weapons within South Africa under the apartheid regime led Abdul Minty and his collaborators to mobilise internationally by mounting the World Campaign. In the Soviet Union, the ruling Communist Party established the Soviet Peace Committee, which was an official organisation directed by the Party. Genuine grassroots activism by Soviet citizens, however, was actively curtailed by the state. In 1982, an important group of Russian activists created the Moscow Trust Group, which called for immediate steps towards nuclear disarmament and greater dialogue between East and West. The government was quick to shut down this group. Its members were subject to intimidation and arrest by the state authorities, while several were confined in asylums.

While public protests critical of state policy were not feasible in countries such as the Soviet Union, they thrived in liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, the government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979–1990) resorted to a range of means to counter the anti-nuclear movement in Britain, whose anti-nuclear demonstrations regularly attracted crowds in the hundreds of thousands.

Activity 1

Watch this video, which features activists, policymakers and historians reflecting on how the British government and the ruling Conservative Party responded to anti-nuclear activism in the UK in the 1980s. After you've watched the video, answer the question below.

Video content is not available in this format.



HOW DID THE UK GOVERNMENT
RESPOND TO PEACE ACTIVISM?

1. How did the ruling Conservative Party try to discredit anti-nuclear activists in the 1980s?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. The UK government as well as groups set up by the Conservative Party attacked anti-nuclear activists as being controlled by Communists and the Soviet Union, being anti-British, and compared nuclear disarmament to the ill-fated appeasement of Nazi Germany in the 1930s. The ruling Conservative Party aimed to tarnish anti-nuclear activists and thereby maintain the government's existing policies on nuclear weapons.

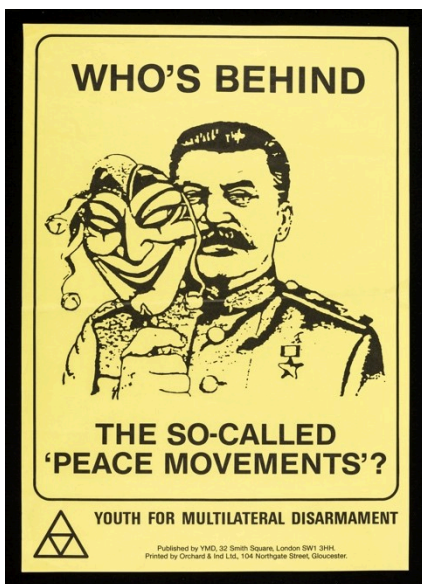


Figure 1 This poster was among the many produced by groups set up by the Conservative Party to discredit the anti-nuclear movement ahead of the 1983 general election in the UK. Depicting former Soviet leader Joseph Stalin (who died in 1953) holding a mask, the implication is that anti-nuclear activists were in fact Communists or were at least being manipulated by the Soviet Union to serve that country's interests rather than Britain's.

While this example shows the lengths to which the UK government and the Conservative Party went to try to bring anti-nuclear activism into disrepute, this engagement was spurred by the wide popularity of calls for nuclear disarmament, with opinion polls in the early 1980s suggesting that a majority of Britons opposed the deployment of Cruise missiles in the UK. This also highlights the challenges faced by anti-nuclear activists, particularly in nuclear-armed states with governments who did not want to revisit their existing policies on nuclear weapons.

2 Government cooperation with anti-nuclear activists

While the UK government had an adversarial relationship with anti-nuclear activists, this was by no means the case in all countries. In some cases, activists and civil society groups cooperated fruitfully with policymakers and governments, resulting in new policies and even international initiatives for nuclear disarmament.

One example is the Six Nation Initiative (also known as the Five Continent Initiative). On 22 May 1984, against the backdrop of the nuclear arms race and heightened tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, six world leaders came together to call for concrete measures to reduce tensions and nuclear weapons. Raúl Alfonsín of Argentina, Indira Gandhi of India, Miguel de la Madrid of Mexico, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Olof Palme of Sweden, and Andreas Papandreou of Greece made the following proposal:

We urge, as a necessary first step, the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as the United Kingdom, France and China, to halt all testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, to be immediately followed by substantial reductions in nuclear forces ... This first step must be followed by a continuing programme of arms reductions leading to general and complete disarmament ... The essential goal must be to reduce and then eliminate the risk of war between nations.

The initiative originated among a group of anti-nuclear activists including New Zealander Nicholas Dunlop, Canadian Douglas Roche, and Icelandic MP Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson. Keen to work across national boundaries and to have activists and politicians work together, they approached several world leaders to take part in the initiative, with six ultimately agreeing by the spring of 1984.



Figure 2 A photo of the world leaders involved in the Six Nation Initiative, pictured here receiving an award for their work towards nuclear disarmament. Andreas Papandreou Foundation (APF), box 4, The Four Continent Peace Initiative, 22 May 1984

Activity 2

Watch this video of then President of Argentina Raúl Alfonsín accepting a peace award for the 1984 Six Nation Initiative, then answer the question below.

Video content is not available in this format.



1. According to President Alfonsín, how can the leaders of six non-nuclear countries influence the governments of nuclear-weapons states towards disarmament?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Alfonsín argues that he and the other five national leaders have reason on their side. Moreover, he suggests that their voices are joined by those of hundreds of millions, referring to the importance of citizens around the world calling for nuclear disarmament.

While the Six Nation Initiative did not immediately succeed in bringing about a nuclear freeze or securing general disarmament, it was nevertheless an important example of world leaders from different parts of the world cooperating with other each and with anti-nuclear activists from around the world to push for nuclear disarmament.

3 Summary of Session 4

In this session, you have learned how different governments have responded to anti-nuclear activists and calls for nuclear disarmament. You saw how in some cases, large-scale activism simply was not feasible, as in apartheid South Africa or the Soviet Union. In democracies where anti-nuclear activists can share their message freely, they have sometimes been targeted by the ruling party or government, as you saw in the case of the UK in the 1980s. Conversely, the relationship between grassroots activists and political leaders can be very constructive, as you saw with the example of the Six Nation Initiative. This range of government responses can also be seen with more recent initiatives such as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which has been championed by some governments and rejected by others.

In the next session you'll explore what impact anti-nuclear activists have had on policymakers.

You can now go to [Session 5](#).

Session 5: What has anti-nuclear activism achieved?

Introduction

In this session, you will engage with a central question for anyone interested in activism: What has anti-nuclear activism achieved? This remains a hotly debated question, with some claiming that anti-nuclear activism has had only a marginal impact, and others arguing that anti-nuclear activists contributed to ending the Cold War.

In this session, you will focus on two cases. First, you'll look at anti-nuclear activism in the UK in the 1980s and consider its impact on policymakers and international affairs. Then you'll learn about Nuclear Weapons Free Zones (NWFZ), which have effectively banned nuclear weapons from entire continents.

1 The Euromissile Crisis and the end of the Cold War

As you have seen, the early 1980s marked a highpoint of anti-nuclear activism in Western Europe, spurred on by the planned deployment of 'Euromissiles' in five European countries. While millions of citizens participated in anti-nuclear activism by attending demonstrations, wearing badges, or lobbying their elected representatives, their impact on policymakers and their achievements remain debated among academics, activists and policymakers.

Activity 1

Watch this video, featuring peace activists, policymakers and historians reflecting on the impact of the UK peace movement of the 1980s. Then answer the questions below.

Video content is not available in this format.



1. How far was the UK peace movement successful in preventing Cruise missiles from being deployed in the UK?
2. Beyond its impact on specific policies, what impact did the anti-nuclear movement have on policymakers in the UK?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. In the short term, the anti-nuclear movement was unsuccessful in preventing Cruise missiles from being deployed in the UK. In the medium term, however, the movement's goal was achieved, as the 1987 INF Treaty resulted directly in the removal of the Cruise missiles that were deployed in England in 1983.

2. Beyond specific policies, such as the deployment of Cruise missiles, the anti-nuclear movement gave voice to widely shared anxieties around nuclear weapons and the possibility of war in the 1980s. This forced the UK Government to explain its defence policies and to justify its decisions in order to engage with the arguments of anti-nuclear activists and to try to convince the public of the merits of the Government's policies.

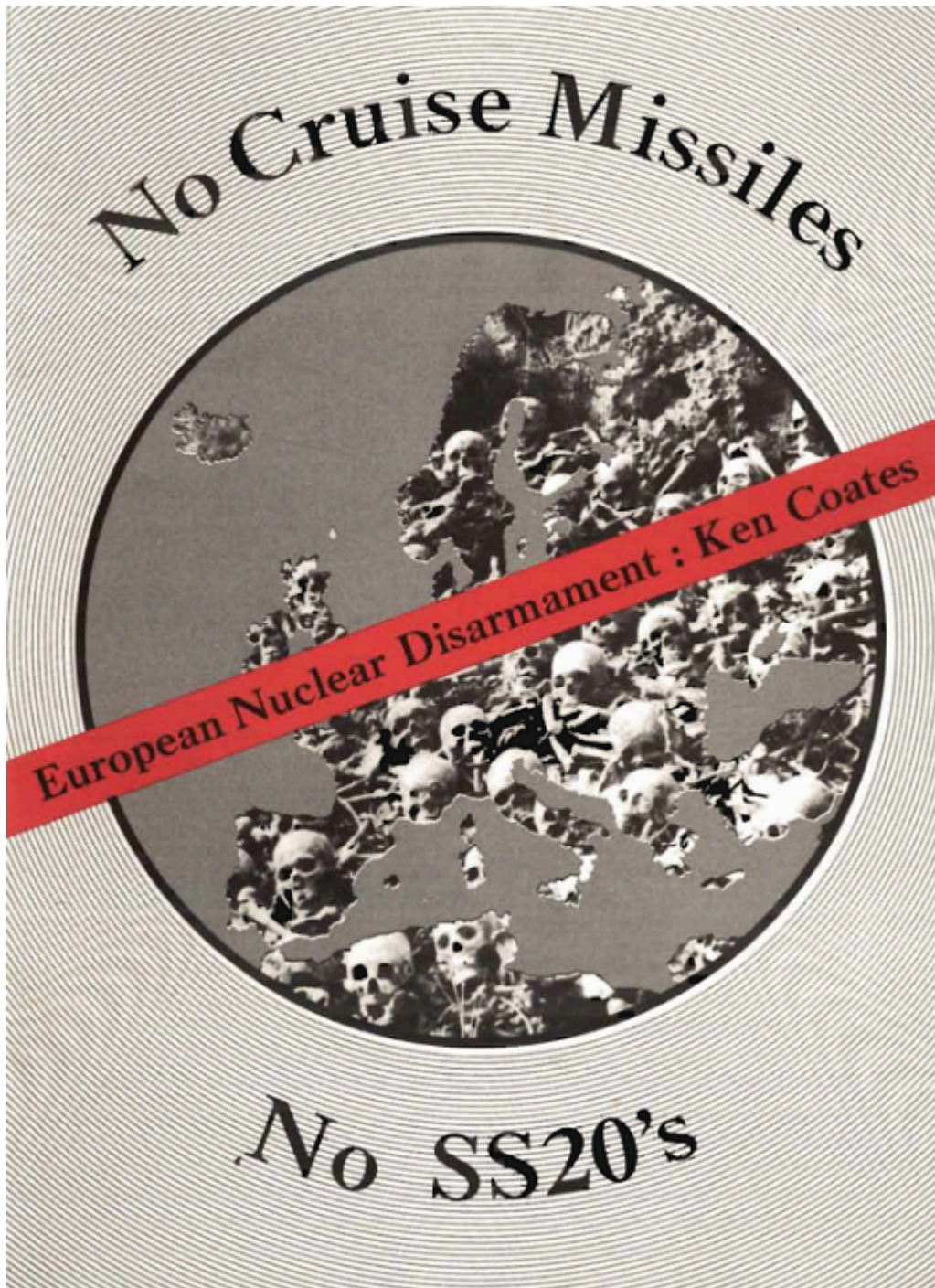


Figure 1 The cover of a 1980 pamphlet written by Ken Coates, one the leaders of

European Nuclear Disarmament (END), calling for the elimination of INF on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

The 1987 INF Treaty was a landmark agreement that paved the way to the end of the Cold War. Signed by US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev, the treaty abolished an entire class of nuclear weapons, known as intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF), which included the 'Euromissiles' recently deployed in Western Europe. As a result, these nuclear weapons were removed from Europe, and the treaty led to further nuclear arms agreements between the superpowers.

The role of anti-nuclear activism in bringing about the INF Treaty and the end of the Cold War continues to be debated among historians, activists and policymakers. The origins of the INF Treaty can be traced to a proposal made by President Reagan in 1981, when he suggested 'the zero option' to the Soviet Union. In short, if the Soviets were to remove their recently-deployed INF, the Americans would cancel their planned deployment of the 'Euromissiles'.

Western European governments had come under increasing pressure from the surging anti-nuclear movements in their countries and public opinion more broadly for NATO to advance a negotiating position that might prevent the need to deploy the 'Euromissiles'. Now these European leaders in turn put pressure on the Reagan administration to advance a credible arms control position.

One source for this American proposal was indeed the international anti-nuclear movement, which had called precisely for the removal of Soviet SS-20s and the cancellation of the planned deployment of Cruise and Pershing by NATO (as you can see in Figure 1). The 'zero option' was initially rejected by the Soviets in 1981, but the changing political situation after the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Kremlin meant that the idea was revived and provided the foundation for the historic 1987 treaty. Thus, even though anti-nuclear activists had been unable to prevent the deployment of the 'Euromissiles' in the early 1980s, their actions and ideas ultimately contributed to the significant reduction of nuclear weapons in Europe later that decade.



Figure 2 Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and US President Ronald Reagan signing the INF Treaty in 1987. The superpowers agreed to eliminate INF from Europe, resulting in the removal of the 'Euromissiles' that had sparked so much opposition.

2 Nuclear weapons free zones (NWFZ)

One central aim of anti-nuclear activism has been the creation of extensive nuclear weapons free zones. The idea is to establish a region, including several countries, in which the deployment, testing or use of nuclear weapons is prohibited. In 1967, governments from across Latin America and the Caribbean signed the Treaty of Tlatelolco, establishing a NWFZ stretching from the US-Mexican border to the southern tip of South America. The initiative was driven by Mexican diplomats, particularly Alfonso García Robles, a committed peace and anti-nuclear activist who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1982 for his achievements. This was the first NWFZ covering inhabited territory, and it provided a model for future NWFZs around the world.

Activity 2

Click on the map below to see which parts of the world are nuclear weapons free zones.

The map is unavailable in this format, please see the OpenLearn course online to view it.

African politicians and civil society have long played a leading role in the struggle against nuclear weapons. Initial activities focused on opposing French nuclear tests carried out in Algeria between 1960 and 1966, with nuclear fallout affecting communities in Algeria and neighbouring countries. In Session 2, you encountered the term 'nuclear colonialism'. In Africa, activism against nuclear weapons was often closely related to the struggle for decolonisation and national independence. Similarly, opposition across Africa to the apartheid regime in South Africa increasingly involved opposition to the 'apartheid bomb', the nuclear weapons developed by the regime. South Africa was the only African country to develop nuclear weapons, and in 1989 the government in Pretoria decided to dismantle these weapons. In 1996, the Treaty of Pelindaba was signed, establishing a NWFZ covering the entirety of Africa. While the treaty was signed in Cairo, it took its name from the main site of the South African nuclear weapons programme, highlighting the historic denuclearisation of South Africa and the entire continent.

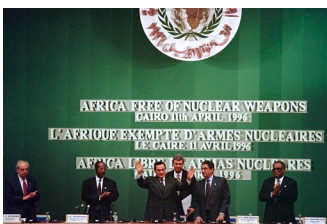


Figure 3 African leaders signing the Treaty of Pelindaba in Cairo in 1996, agreeing to the creation of the African NWFZ.

Since the signing of the Treaty of Pelindaba, African policymakers, activists and civil society have played a leading role in advocating nuclear disarmament, including the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which you'll learn more about in Session 6.

3 Summary of Session 5

In this session, you have explored how anti-nuclear and peace activists contributed to the removal of some nuclear weapons from Europe and to the end of the Cold War, particularly by influencing the 1987 INF Treaty. You have also seen how activists, broadly defined including diplomats and policymakers as well as civil society, have helped create nuclear weapons free zones covering much of the world.

In Session 6, the final session of this course, you will learn more about one of the biggest successes of the anti-nuclear movement: the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

You can now go to [Session 6](#).

Session 6: Nuclear arms control and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

Introduction

In this session, you'll learn more about the work of anti-nuclear activists and governments to stop the spread of nuclear weapons, also known as nuclear proliferation.

First, you'll explore earlier efforts to limit the spread of nuclear weapons, specifically with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Then, you'll turn to the more recent work of the NGO the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and their success in bringing about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which makes nuclear weapons illegal. You'll end this session by reflecting on the ongoing role of activists and how individuals can get involved in anti-nuclear activism today.

1 The Non-Proliferation Treaty

For decades, the cornerstone of the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime has been the structures of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This landmark international treaty, signed in 1968 and entering into force two years later, aimed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, while providing safeguards and inspection regimes. Since then, 191 countries have signed the treaty, including the five who had nuclear weapons at the time: the US, the USSR, France, the UK and China. The NPT sought to prevent further countries from developing nuclear weapons. At the same time, the existing nuclear weapons states agreed to gradually reduce their own nuclear stockpiles and to work towards nuclear disarmament.



Figure 1 President Lyndon Johnson looks on as Secretary Dean Rusk signs the NPT, July 1968, Washington.

Over the years, however, the limitations of the NPT have become apparent. Contrary to the Treaty's objectives, four countries have since progressively developed nuclear weapons of their own: India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea. (As you have seen, South Africa, while not an NPT member at the time, developed its own nuclear weapons before disarming and joining the NPT as a non-nuclear armed country.) There is also widespread resentment that the treaty's hierarchical and undemocratic structure serves to enshrine the 'nuclear haves' and permanently resign all other countries to being 'nuclear have-nots', a division that has even been likened to 'nuclear apartheid'. Furthermore, the original five nuclear weapons states have made scant progress towards getting rid of their own nuclear weapons and working towards nuclear disarmament.

Indeed, in the twenty-first century countries such as China are rapidly expanding their nuclear arsenal despite being a signatory to the NPT, while others continue to modernise theirs. With rising international tensions and irresponsible rhetoric from leaders of nuclear weapons states, recent years have seen a revival of nuclear anxieties around the world and renewed efforts by activists to rid the world of nuclear weapons once and for all. As the following table shows, despite attempts to limit, if not remove entirely, the threat that nuclear weapons pose to the world, the number of countries who own them has increased.

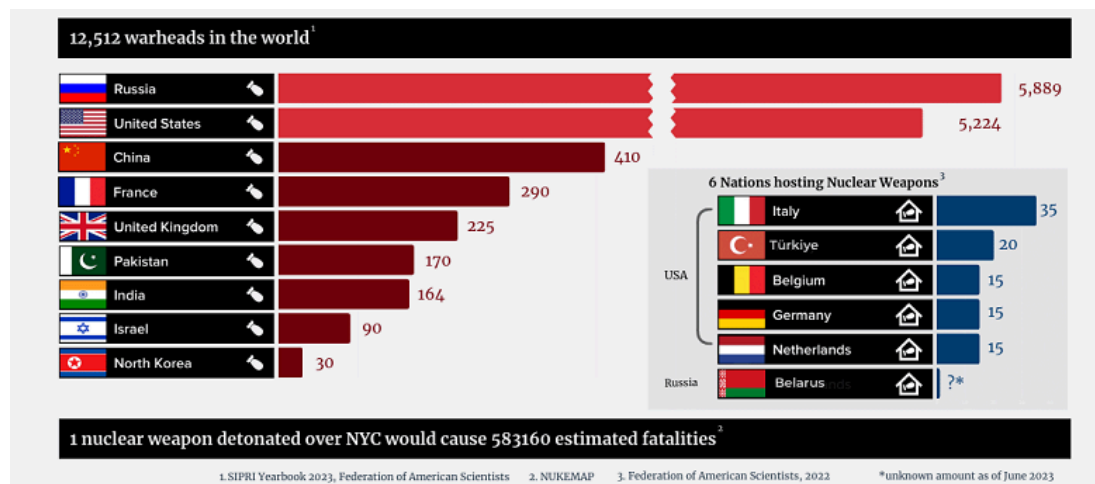


Figure 2 A table showing which countries have nuclear weapons and the size of their respective nuclear arsenals as of 2023.

2 The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

It was in this context that the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons was launched in 2006. The result of extensive international cooperation among activists and NGOs, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) is now comprised of over 700 partner organisations in well over 100 countries around the world. It has focused on the humanitarian threat posed by nuclear weapons, and its central mission has been to encourage governments to sign, ratify and adhere to the TPNW.

The TPNW clearly prohibits the development, testing, production, stationing or use of nuclear weapons. Unlike the NPT, the treaty applies equally to all signatory countries, in theory resolving the tension between nuclear ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ of the earlier treaty. It also builds on the NWFZ treaties you learned about in Session 5, expanding some of these provisions to the entire world. The TPNW was adopted by the UN in 2017 and entered into force in 2021. The TPNW is now a binding international law and as a result, nuclear weapons are illegal. As of 2024, 93 states have signed the treaty, with 70 of these taking the next step and ratifying the TPNW, demonstrating the widespread global support for nuclear disarmament. Problematically, none of the nuclear weapons states have signed the TPNW.

Take a look at the following chart which highlights the main differences between the 1968 NPT and the 2017 TPNW.

Table 1 explains some of the key differences between the NPT and the TPNW.

Table 1 The key differences between the NPT and the TPNW.

The NPT (1968):	The TPNW (2017):
Prohibits five of the nine nuclear-armed states – China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US – from transferring their nuclear weapons to anyone else or assisting other states to acquire nuclear weapons.	Prohibits a wide range of activities relating to nuclear weapons, including their use, threatened use, development, testing, manufacture, and possession, as well as assistance with any of those activities.
Prohibits all other parties from manufacturing or otherwise acquiring nuclear weapons.	Establishes a legal framework for the verified, time-bound elimination of nuclear-weapon programmes and the removal of foreign-owned nuclear weapons from the territory of parties.
Facilitates the exchange of equipment, materials, and scientific and technological information for the ‘peaceful uses of nuclear energy’, subject to safeguard agreements.	Reinforces and extends the NPT requirement for safeguards to ensure that nuclear materials and technology are not used for weapons.
Requires all parties to ‘pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race and to nuclear disarmament’ (without specifying what those measures must be or imposing any timeline).	Establishes a legal framework for assisting victims of the use and testing of nuclear weapons, and for the remediation of contaminated environments.

(Source: ICAN, 2023, p. 3)

Activity 1

In 2017, ICAN was awarded the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize 'for its work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and for its ground-breaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons'.

Watch this video featuring ICAN's Executive Director at the time, Beatrice Fihn, after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, and then answer the questions below.

Video content is not available in this format.



1. What motivated ICAN to take action against nuclear weapons?
2. What are the next steps towards nuclear disarmament described in the speech?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. Beatrice Fihn explains that those involved in ICAN had lost patience with the lack of progress towards nuclear abolition, despite commitments such as those in the 1968 NPT to work towards nuclear disarmament. She also cites the importance of the hibakusha, who have worked for decades to ensure nuclear weapons are never used again.
2. Beatrice Fihn explains that, following the adoption of the TPNW in 2017, the next step is to 'go local' to ensure individual national governments sign and ratify the treaty. She encourages citizens to put pressure on their representatives so that their country signs and ratifies the TPNW.

As you heard in Beatrice Fihn's speech, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons includes anyone interested in the issue and willing to work towards a world free of nuclear weapons. As a result of 'going local' and individuals putting pressure on their governments to sign and ratify the TPNW, the treaty entered into force in 2021 – a landmark achievement in the history of anti-nuclear activism.

3 Anti-nuclear activism today

The TPNW marks an important milestone in the decades-long struggle to abolish nuclear weapons. However, none of the powers that have nuclear weapons have to date signed the treaty. There is still more work to be done. What are the next steps in the campaign and, if you're interested in this issue, how could you get involved?

Activity 2

Watch this video from Melissa Parke, the Executive Director of ICAN, and answer the question below.

Video content is not available in this format.



1. How can you, as an individual, take action against nuclear weapons?

Provide your answer...

Discussion

1. The success of the TPNW depends on widespread support and implementation. Individual citizens such as yourself can take action by reaching out to your elected officials urging them to ensure your country signs and ratifies the TPNW. You can organise events in your community to raise awareness of the issue, and speak to banks and companies to encourage them to divest from companies building nuclear weapons.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing anti-nuclear activism is that the existing nuclear weapons states and some of their allies have so far failed to sign the treaty. The signature

and ratification of the TPNW by these countries would help make nuclear disarmament a reality and remains the focus of current and future campaigning by international activists.

4 Summary of Session 6

In this session, you have learned about earlier attempts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, particularly through the Non-Proliferation Treaty. You also explored how the limitations of this treaty gave rise to a new campaign, which resulted in the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which has declared nuclear weapons illegal. Finally, you learned about anti-nuclear activism today, and how you can be involved.

5 Course conclusion

Hopefully you have enjoyed this OpenLearn course. Now that you've completed it, you should have a much deeper knowledge of how activists and citizens have mobilised to oppose nuclear weapons in different parts of the world. You learned why people have opposed nuclear weapons, what forms of action they engaged in, and how they cooperated across national borders. You also learned how different governments responded to anti-nuclear activism, what impact activists have had, and about the ongoing campaign regarding the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Before completing this course, we would like to invite you to complete an [end-of-course survey](#). Your answers will be completely anonymous – we will have no way of knowing who wrote which comments – but they will enable us to measure the impact of this course and to improve it based on your feedback.

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Further resources

This course has been produced as part of an AHRC-funded project on 'Global histories of anti-nuclear activism', in collaboration with nine partner institutions in seven countries across five continents. You can learn more about this project and the other resources and publications we are producing by visiting [the project website](#).

To learn more about ICAN's activities, you can explore [their website](#).

Where next?

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Acknowledgements

This free course was written by Luc-André Brunet and Eirini Karamouzi.

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Introduction and guidance

Images

Course image: Homer Sykes / Alamy Stock Photo

ICAN logo: <https://www.icanw.org/>

Session 1

Images

Figure 1: INTERFOTO / Alamy Stock Photo

Figure 2: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_nuclear_tests_at_Maralinga#/media/File:-Buffalo_R4_001.jpg

Figure 3: <https://warpp.info/en/m6/infographics/nuclear-weapons-explosions-1945-to-2018/https://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/deed.en>

Audio/Video

Activity 1 audio: talking about Hiroshima 6.8.1945. The recording is from December 2023 during a conference co-organised by the The Open University, University of Sheffield and the Hiroshima Peace Institute at Hiroshima City University (Japan) with the latter hosting the event.

Activity 2 video: courtesy ICAN <https://www.icanw.org/>

Session 2

Images

Figure 1: courtesy CNDUK <https://cnduk.org/peoples-history-of-cnd-aldermaston-and-the-early-radicalism/>

Figure 2: Photographer : Bogaerts, Rob / Anefo Copyright holder: National Archives
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Figure 3: DVD cover of BBC film *Threads* (1984) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Threads_%281984_film%29

Figure 4: <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/Newsbriefs/9509/9-13/>

Figure 5: Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (N.Z.); publisher; 1980s; New Zealand

Audio/Video

Activity 1 video: What forms of peace activism took place in the UK courtesy London School of Economics <https://www.lse.ac.uk/>

Session 3

Images

Figure 1: Homer Sykes / Alamy Stock Photo

Figure 2: https://www.reddit.com/r/HistoryPorn/comments/1agogcs/antinuclear_demonstration_in_bonn_germany_we_dont/

Figure 3: Photo: courtesy Mike Kantey

Figure 4: Poster advertising an event co-organised by the Anti Apartheid Movement CND in Exeter, England June 1982

Audio/Video

Activity 1 video: Was UK peace activism part of a worldwide movement? Courtesy: LSE <https://www.lse.ac.uk/>

Activity 2 video: from The Future ReImagined, session 2, 22 September 2023, featuring Ambassador Abdul Minty at University of Johannesburg

Session 4

Images

Figure 1: poster by Youth Multilateral Disarmament <https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/project-docs/cnd-archives/004-0001.pdf>

Figure 2: Andreas Papandreou Foundation (APF), box 4, The Four Continent Peace Initiative, 22 May 1984

Audio/Video

Activity 1 video: How did the UK Government respond to peace activism? Courtesy: London School of Economics and Political Science <https://www.lse.ac.uk/>

Activity 2 video: BEYOND WAR AWARD - 1985 - Five Continent Peace Initiative by Beyond War Foundation (clip 40.00-42.50) <https://archive.org/details/BeyondWarAward-1985> - <https://creativecommons.org/public-domain/cc0/>

Session 5

Images

Figure 1: Courtesy The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation Ltd, Ken Coates, European Nuclear Disarmament. <https://www.russfound.org/END/EuropeanNuclearDisarmament.html>

Figure 2: USA Government - Public Domain

Figure 3: AMR NABIL / Stringer / via Getty Images

Audio/Video

Activity 1 video: How successful was the UK peace movement? Courtesy: LSE <https://www.lse.ac.uk/>

Session 6

Images

Figure 1: President Lyndon B. Johnson looks on as Secretary of State Dean Rusk signs the NPT, July 1, 1968, Washington. Photo: National Archives LB306-PSD-68-2055 <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/NPT-in-Pictures.pdf>

Figure 2: Table showing countries with nuclear weapons in Which countries have nuclear weapons? <https://www.icanw.org/>

Tables

Table 1: The key differences between the NPT and the TPNW in ICAN (2013) (p. 3) *How the TPNW Complements, Reinforces, and Builds On the NPT*.

Audio/Video

Activity 1 video: Beatrice Fihn. Courtesy: ICAN <https://www.icanw.org/>

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