

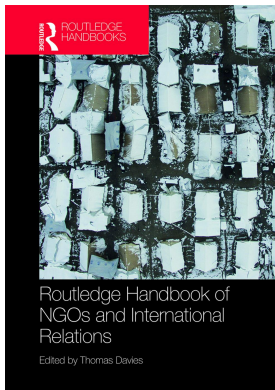
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NGOs and peace

Margarita H. Petrova

There are various definitions of peace, and respectively, NGO activities that would fall within a broad framework of peace-seeking – from nonviolent resistance of war and refusal to use force, efforts at ending or making war less probable, and curbing armaments, to building up the legal and institutional frameworks that would outlaw war and provide conflict resolution mechanisms, to an encompassing view of positive peace that ensures people live with dignity in a just society (Cortright 2008: 6–8). This chapter looks narrowly at NGO antiwar and disarmament efforts and focuses on the post-WWII period, although peace and disarmament NGOs have a long history going back to the 19th century and a sizable literature thereof exists (Cooper 1991; Charnovitz 1997; Lynch 1999; Laity 2002; Davies 2007, 2014; Pugh 2012). It examines the effects of NGO activities in relation to the domestic and international political opportunity structures in which they unfold. Effectiveness is evaluated by the extent to which NGOs achieve their proclaimed goals. These include concrete policy changes, but also more broadly changing societal attitudes by educating the public, reframing issues, influencing public opinion, and generating media attention.¹

I argue that the end of the Cold War was a watershed moment that opened new opportunities for NGO mobilization at the international level and transnationalization of their networks. NGO strategies moved away from largescale protest and grassroots mobilization toward elite-level lobbying and norm advocacy. Finally, whereas during the Cold War norm development in the disarmament field depended on superpower negotiation, from the 1990s there has been a trend toward establishing legal norms banning conventional and nuclear weapons without the great powers, yet aiming at binding the latter to the international norms created by the treaties.

1945–1960s: elite lobbying and the rise of antinuclear NGOs

The first antinuclear efforts aimed at preventing the use of nuclear bombs against Japan and the eventual dismantling of existing weapons and vesting authority for nuclear energy in an international agency. They started with the Frank Report and a petition against the use of the bombs by some of the scientists working on the Manhattan Project in the two months prior to the atomic bombings. In 1945, they led to the establishment of the Federation of American Scientists and the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. As information about the effects of the

Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings trickled in, fear of the new weapons spread among the public and gave a boost to the scientists' advocacy. Eventually it influenced American policy with the Acheson-Lilienthal plan for the destruction of atomic weapons, the creation of a system to monitor that no weapons are developed, and an Atomic Development Authority to control fissile material for peaceful purposes. However, the hardening of the American position in the Baruch plan (envisioning destruction of US weapons only after international controls had been established and no UN Security Council veto on enforcement procedures) and Soviet rejection thereof doomed the scientists' attempt to establish international controls on nuclear energy (Wittner 1993: 59–64). Where their efforts bore some fruit was in educating the public and spurring aversion to nuclear weapons that constrained the US from using them in the Korean War (Tannenwald 2007; Wittner 2009: 32–34). However, the window of opportunity to curb an impending arms race closed with the escalation of the Cold War, which legitimated the pursuit of nuclear weapons for national security purposes and made the work of activists in the early 1950s difficult amid accusations of their having communist links (Wittner 2009: 49–50).

In the mid-1950s, the political opportunities for the scientists' movement improved after the death of Stalin and the end of McCarthyism in the US (Tannenwald 2007: 158; Evangelista 1999: 25). Antinuclear sentiment was reinvigorated with the testing of hydrogen bombs, especially after radiation fallout over the Marshall Islands and a Japanese fishing boat in 1954. In 1955, Bertrand Russell issued a manifesto for the abolition of nuclear weapons and peaceful resolution of all conflicts endorsed by Einstein and other prominent scientists that catalyzed renewed scientist activism (Evangelista 1999: 31). In 1957, the first Pugwash conference on science and world affairs among scientists from the West, East, and nonaligned countries was organized. One of the signatories of the Russell-Einstein manifesto and 1954 Nobel laureate in chemistry, Linus Pauling, also launched a scientist petition to end nuclear testing. In the US, one of the main antinuclear organizations, the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), was set up by prominent figures calling for the suspension of nuclear testing. Physicians for Social Responsibility, Council for a Livable World, and Women Strike for Peace were created in the next few years to work for a test ban. In 1957 in the UK, a National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapon Tests was established and grew into the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Both SANE and CND became large organizations with numerous local chapters in the US and UK, respectively. In the UK, grassroots mobilization underpinned the annual Easter marches between London and Aldermaston (the site of the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment some 50 miles away) that gathered tens of thousands of people between 1958 and 1963 (Wittner 1997: 47–51; Meyer 1990: 140–141). In the US, advocacy remained targeted mostly at the elite level and aimed at creating media and public attention. To that end, SANE involved Albert Schweitzer, philosopher, missionary, and receiver of the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize, in the cause of stopping nuclear testing. Engaged in more contentious activities, Women Strike for Peace held demonstrations and Non-Violent Action against Nuclear Weapons organized numerous direct actions against test sites in the US and the Pacific Ocean that gained media publicity, but had limited public support (Wittner 1997: 30–33, 54–57).

Ultimately, NGO mobilization contributed to the adoption of the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), although pressure from nonaligned countries and great power interests pushed in the same direction. Apart from stoking public apprehension about and opposition to nuclear testing, NGOs directly facilitated the negotiations of the treaty with SANE's founder, Norman Cousins, acting as an intermediary between Kennedy and Khrushchev when the negotiations stalled (Wittner 2009: 109–110). More broadly, NGOs in that period shifted the discourse on nuclear weapons from national defense toward consideration of their radioactive, health, and environmental effects. They also elevated the public salience of the issue and made governments

consider the impact of their national decisions on world public opinion, thus circumscribing their freedom to use nuclear weapons (Tannenwald 2007: 161–162).

Overall, during this period well-known scientists and public figures were key in the anti-nuclear movement. Individuals played important roles in American and British NGOs, as well as in establishing transnational relations between American and Soviet scientists and prominent citizens (Evangelista 1999: 32–35). The social status of the leaders of the main NGOs facilitated their access to policymakers and influenced their choice of tactics (Tannenwald 2007: 160). Thus the story of the movement in its early post-WWII years is to a large extent about the dedicated efforts of prominent persons, especially scientists, in raising public awareness and curbing the dangers of nuclear weapons. The award of the 1962 Nobel Peace Prize to Pauling in 1963 upon the PTBT coming into effect speaks to that.

However, with the PTBT and the Nonproliferation Treaty following in 1968 – steps to limit the fallout and spread of nuclear weapons that allayed public concerns – the antinuclear movement lost steam and was largely overtaken by the institutionalization of arms control in the US and the Soviet Union, leading to the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks and the 1972 ABM treaty. The proponents of arms control formed an epistemic community of scientists concentrated in RAND, MIT, and Harvard in the US that spread transnationally through the Pugwash conferences (Adler 1992; Evangelista 1999: 165, 193–233; Meyer 1990: 66–67). Arms control came to occupy the middle ground between disarmament proponents who could see it as “a first step toward disarmament” and conservatives clamoring for more weapons (Adler 1992: 125). It became key in stabilizing superpower relations and avoiding nuclear war, without, however, challenging the status quo. In the same period, public interest got absorbed by the Vietnam War.

The anti-Vietnam War movement: between respectability and radical politics

The Vietnam War engendered widespread and diverse opposition, which has been studied by historians,² much less so by social movement scholars and political scientists (McAdam and Su 2002: 696–697), and has received close to nil attention in IR. The study of NGOs and transnational activism in IR started in earnest later, in the early 1990s, focusing mostly on the transnational dimension of the phenomenon or comparative case studies in different countries from this more recent period (Risse-Kappen 1991, 1995; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Despite its mostly domestic, US focus,³ the Vietnam antiwar movement was one of the most massive mobilizations of antiwar sentiment driven by different NGOs. The movement had several strands – the “new left” comprising student groups, the “old left” associated with the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, and liberal organizations including Americans for Democratic Action and antinuclear groups, such as SANE and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) (Cortright 2008: 157). Their tactics differed widely – from the student protests organized by Student Peace Union and Students for a Democratic Society, to mass demonstrations of the “old left”, to the liberal wing’s lobbying Congress and working through party structures, especially by challenging President Johnson in the presidential primaries of the Democratic Party in 1968 (Cortright 2008: 157–160; Chatfield 2004: 491–492; Katz 1983).

After President Nixon came to power with plans for escalating military operations, the opportunities for working through existing institutional channels narrowed and the contentious, protest actions of the peace movement grew (Katz 1983). In the fall of 1969, the liberal part of the movement organized the Vietnam moratorium movement to interrupt work and a march in Washington D.C., seen as “the largest mass volunteer actions in American history” (quote in Cortright 2008: 161). The number of people avoiding the draft also kept increasing. War

opposition spread among war veterans and active-duty servicemen, with the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, set up in 1967. Growing numbers of veterans joined rallies and organized their own actions, such as public soldiers' testimonies of atrocities committed in Vietnam, lobbying, and protests. The veterans' involvement provided legitimation to the antiwar movement (Cortright 2008: 165–166), while draft resistance, desertion, and even lethal assaults on officers by subordinate troops undermined the US warfighting capacity from within.⁴

It is difficult to say which organizations and strategies exerted most pressure on policymaking toward negotiations and ending the war. Taking protests as a proxy for movement strength misses other contributions, especially by its liberal wing that toward 1969 saw protests as ineffective and shifted toward grassroots mobilization and influencing congressional elections (Katz 1983; Lefkowitz 2005). Indeed, Mueller (1973: 24) conjectured that “the war might have been somewhat less popular, had the protest not existed.” Similarly, Chatfield (2004) argued that radical protesters could be easily dismissed by the Johnson and Nixon administrations as fringe elements and even accused of promoting Soviet interests. In contrast, liberal organizations that garnered support among members of the Democratic Party and congressmen presented a more formidable force. Katz (1983) also highlighted the respectable politics of the liberal movement that sought to attract middle-class support, but found it had little impact on policy. McAdam and Su (2002) show the contradictory and limited policy effects of the movement, which tried to combine disruptive politics to generate media and public attention and at the same time appear committed to democratic politics. Liberal organizations influenced the Democratic Party, but also split it, because the movement remained an elite, intellectual endeavor alienated from the working class that made up part of the party's constituency (Walzer 1973). In contrast, for Cortright (2008: 159) each part of the movement contributed to the eventual withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam. Outsider pressure had to be mobilized together with insider lobbying to make a difference on a foreign policy issue over which the military-industrial complex held sway. The movement affected concrete decisions, such as instituting the draft lottery and limiting congressional funding for the war. Arguably, Nixon's position on the war gradually softened over his terms in office and ultimately the antiwar organizations' position in favor of immediate withdrawal of US troops was closer to the outcome of peace negotiations than Nixon's preconditions (Lefkowitz 2005: 19–21).

Despite the uncertain or gloomy evaluations of concrete movement outcomes, its enduring effect was in shaping future US policies and military thinking. In Walzer's words (1973: 26), it “made the waging of the war morally costly . . . [and] began . . . the long process of setting limits to what governments can do and to what men must bear.” Years later this resulted in the 1984 Weinberger (also Powell) doctrine requiring that troops be sent to war only as a last resort, backed by public and congressional support. Although American intervention in Central America and proxy wars did not end,⁵ costly wars of choice were largely avoided till the 2003 Iraq war.

1970–1989: weapons politics under Cold War constraints

International Humanitarian Law and conventional weapons

The Vietnam War also spurred major developments in international humanitarian law (IHL) and led to some weapons restrictions. The link of these developments to the antiwar movement was indirect – mainly through the visibility of napalm use, raised by some organizations, including the International War Crimes Tribunal initiated by Bertrand Russell in the UK (SIPRI 1978), and the media. The issue attracted significant attention at the UN General Assembly

and eventually made its way, together with fragmentation weapons, small caliber projectiles, and landmines, onto the agenda of the diplomatic conferences on the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, before being considered in a separate forum that resulted in the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). Some American NGOs, such as the AFSC, undertook action against fragmentation weapons and organized protests at manufacturer sites. However, these efforts remained local and only a small part of the larger antiwar movement without undertaking a weapon-specific campaign (Prokosch 1995). Napalm use received much wider attention and for many became a symbol of the atrocities perpetrated in Vietnam and a rallying cry for the peace movement (Neer 2013: 152–153).

In the diplomatic arena, the organizations working for weapon restrictions from a humanitarian perspective were mainly the ICRC and SIPRI, urged along by a number of nonaligned states led by Sweden. Early attempts by the ICRC in the 1950s to restrict the use of “uncontrollable,” including nuclear, weapons within an IHL framework were unsuccessful, because of opposition by the nuclear powers (Kalshoven 1971). During the Cold War the consent of the great powers remained a necessary and limiting element of any agreements toward restricting conventional weapons, while NGO input was confined to expert legal views at the diplomatic level. Nevertheless, the adoption of the 1977 Additional Protocols and the 1980 CCW strengthened the humanitarian principle of civilian protection and laid the basis for NGO advocacy on prohibiting indiscriminate weapons in the 1990s (Cottrell 2009).

Nuclear disarmament

During this period, different types of NGOs worked for nuclear disarmament employing different strategies. The Federation of American Scientists (FAS) and the Pugwash movement carried out scientific research, dissemination, and advocacy. Physicians for Social Responsibility and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) educated the public in talks highlighting the health effects of nuclear weapons and catastrophic consequences of their use. Religious groups such as AFSC focused on lobbying activities in Washington, while the Ploughshares movement engaged in civil disobedience and symbolic acts of witnessing against arms manufacturers and nuclear bases. Greenpeace was founded in 1971 and its attention-grabbing actions, such as trespassing and sailing ships into testing areas, generated significant media coverage. The Greenham Common women’s protest camp in the UK provided a catalyst for similar camps by women’s groups across Europe and the US. However, the most focused effort of the period was the US Nuclear Weapons Freeze campaign (NWFC) advocating a bilateral freeze on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons by the US and the Soviet Union. In Europe, mass antinuclear movements emerged in response to NATO’s plans to deploy intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in five NATO countries (Wittner 2003).

Reagan’s presidency both narrowed the institutional channels open to peace organizations and, by its bellicose rhetoric and actions intensifying the arms race, created conditions for mobilization of the peace movement. NWFC grew quickly. Successfully inserting a freeze resolution on the ballot in local and congressional elections, by 1982 it had become “the largest electoral mobilization for peace in US history” and organized a large peace protest drawing about a million people (Cortright 2008: 145). Yet, the popularity of the movement did not result in goal achievement. After politicians picked up the issue, NWFC focused on lobbying congressmen. As a result, Congress passed a watered-down version of the freeze resolution and NWFC continued down the path of routine politics by throwing its weight behind the 1984 Democratic Party presidential candidate who endorsed the freeze. After his defeat, NWFC dissipated, while Washington-based groups reoriented their lobbying toward distinct

weapons systems or a comprehensive test ban. Thus, the American fragmented domestic political structure curbed NWFC's ability to reach its policy objective. It offered multiple points of access to divergent societal interests, but prevented anyone from gaining the upper hand. Under Reagan's administration, NWFC had difficulty competing with military-industrial interests promoted by conservative appointees. Navigating between opposing political interests in Congress diluted the campaign message, while the movement itself became coopted in institutionalized politics (Meyer 1990).

In contrast to NWFC that aimed at the political mainstream by demanding a bilateral, US and Soviet, freeze, the European campaigns focused on preventing NATO's INF deployment and saw unilateral disarmament by European countries as a first step in disentangling Western and Eastern Europe from their dependence on the superpowers. It also sought to link disarmament to human rights promotion and connected with civil society groups in Eastern Europe (Kaldor 1982: 780–781).

The chances of NGOs translating mobilization into policy impact depended in large part on the domestic political structures they faced. In the US, the fragmented structure hampered direct policy impact, but NWFC nevertheless left its mark by pushing the Reagan administration toward engaging in arms control through public opinion and Congress (Meyer 1990). In Germany, working within a corporatist domestic structure, disarmament organizations managed to embed their ideas in new and traditional political actors, such as the Green Party and the Social Democratic Party. Working through a consensus-oriented political process, the movement reoriented German foreign policy against nuclear modernization of NATO forces in Europe and toward a general conciliatory policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union (Risse-Kappen 1991; Meyer 1999). In other corporatist domestic structures, such as the Netherlands and Denmark, where multiparty systems and proportional representation provided access, the peace movements affected government policy by slowing down missile deployment (Cortright and Pagnucco 1997: 165–168).

Although there was a degree of coordination between organizations in the US and Europe and cooperation between Western and Eastern activists, NGO campaigns remained largely focused on their domestic settings. The European protests against NATO's INF deployments exerted pressure on US foreign policy via alliance politics (Knopf 1993), but there was little synergy between the American and Western European campaigns (Cortright and Pagnucco 1997).

Where transnationalism mattered was in establishing connections between Western and Eastern scientists in the Pugwash conferences and later among physicians in IPPNW. These connections led to the antinuclear movement's most important policy impact when Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union and relied on the transnational movement of scientists and physicians for his new thinking ideas, including on nuclear arms control and overall defense postures. Then the Soviet state-controlled domestic structure allowed Gorbachev to implement those ideas from the top. Thus, the most important, albeit indirect, effect of disarmament NGOs was in peacefully ending the Cold War (Evangelista 1999).⁶

After the Cold War: norm-building without the great powers

The 1990s represented a golden era for NGOs with their numbers rapidly increasing as new opportunities for NGO action opened, funding sources increased, and a norm favoring the engagement of NGOs in democracy promotion and development assistance got established (Reimann 2006). Political opportunities for NGOs also increased in terms of access to domestic and especially international institutions (Tarrow 2001). NGO participation in UN conferences and negotiation processes improved, partly as a result of NGO efforts themselves. Globalization

and technological developments, such as the Internet and email, also catalyzed NGO activities, reach, and coalition-making (Davies 2014: 124; Nye 2011). Finally, the end of the Cold War relaxed the constraints on independent policy pursuits by middle-sized Western states, creating the conditions for partnership with NGOs and norm-making without the great powers.

In addition to these general trends, IR work focused on the interconnection between international and domestic political opportunities for NGO advocacy. In their “boomerang model,” Keck and Sikkink (1998) highlighted how local NGOs, faced with blockages in their domestic structure, link with international NGOs to mobilize international pressure from above against their unresponsive governments. Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999) explored further the mechanisms through which NGOs reshape domestic political opportunities in an interactive “spiral model” of international norm diffusion. Moving beyond external constraints and opportunities, scholars have studied the impact of NGOs’ internal structure and position in larger advocacy networks on issue emergence and campaign success. Wong (2012) emphasized the role of centralized decision-making (and decentralized implementation) for the success of NGOs working on human rights and weapons issues. Carpenter (2011, 2014) argued that “gatekeeper” NGOs (connected to many nodes or linking isolated nodes in a network) push normative change in the weapons field more successfully than large grassroots campaigns. Others have focused on the NGOs’ use of different discursive mechanisms, such as persuasion (Deitelhoff 2009; Price 1998a) or rhetorical entrapment and positive enticement (Petrova 2016, 2019), in influencing international negotiations and state positions on issues such as the ICC, landmines, and cluster munitions.

(II) legality of nuclear weapons?

The end of East–West antagonism and reductions in nuclear weapons and military budgets appeared to offer the ultimate peace dividend. Fears of nuclear war receded and no longer animated disarmament activism. The Conference on Disarmament became deadlocked and the 1995 Review Conference of the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) indefinitely extended the treaty in exchange for a pledge by the nuclear-weapon states to reduce nuclear weapons. From the social movements of the 1980s, disarmament refocused toward institutionalized, elite-level approaches and sought to push the nuclear powers toward disarmament indirectly by working with interested states and strengthening legal and social norms against nuclear weapons (Tannenwald 2007: 349).

The major initiative in the 1990s was the World Court Project, pursued by the International Peace Bureau, IPPNW, and the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms (IALANA). Those organizations worked with nonaligned states, and against opposition by the US and other nuclear powers, to secure resolutions by the World Health Organization and the UN General Assembly asking the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an advisory opinion on the legality of using nuclear weapons. The campaign mainly lobbied government officials. However, it also gathered about four million citizens’ “Declarations of Conscience” to use as evidence of “the dictates of public conscience” that should be considered in evaluating the legality of means of warfare according to the Martens Clause in IHL and brought survivors of the nuclear bombings and tests to testify to the court (Dewes and Green 1999: 69–70; Tannenwald 2007: 353–354).

Although the ICJ Advisory Opinion left the possibility that nuclear weapons be used in ultimate self-defense, it added to their delegitimization (Tannenwald 2007) and gave a boost to NGOs. Activists engaging in direct action against military installations successfully used the Opinion for their legal defense. The Abolition 2000 NGO network was launched with the

goal of securing a nuclear weapons convention by 2000, while in 1998, the IPPNW, IALANA, IPB, and WILPF, among other NGOs, established the Middle Powers Initiative to work with middle-power governments to put pressure on nuclear-weapons states to eliminate nuclear weapons (Dewes and Green 1999: 74–75). Following the ICJ Opinion and the conclusion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996, most NGOs focused their advocacy within the NPT forum and on government lobbying. Thus the initiatives of the 1990s became institutionalized at the international level and the movement for a nuclear weapons convention went on, but largely lost steam in the next 10 years when the US and Russia bilaterally or unilaterally reduced their nuclear weapons, without, however, considering their elimination. Public opinion remained supportive of a nuclear-free world, but nuclear disarmament provoked little interest (Wittner 2009: 217).

Humanitarian disarmament: to conventional and back to nuclear weapons

At the advocacy level, interest shifted from weapons of mass destruction to conventional weapons, killing and mutilating people in conflict and post-conflict situations. In the late 1980s, antipersonnel landmines drew attention as UN agencies and relief organizations moved to assist populations in the wake of conflicts in Cambodia, Mozambique, and Angola (Cameron et al. 1998; Hubert 2000; Rutherford 2011). Among the first organizations to run into the landmine problem were the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, Handicap International, and demining organizations, such as Mines Advisory Group. Human Rights Watch (HRW) also became aware of the issue in its work in Central America and Asia.

NGOs focused on the humanitarian impact of the weapons on civilians and, using the IHL principles of distinction and proportionality, argued that their humanitarian costs far outweighed their military utility (Price 1998a; Rutherford 2000; Petrova 2018). This discursive shift toward humanitarian disarmament underpinned NGO efforts for weapon prohibitions in the 1990s and 2000s.

Whereas in the past, the ICRC was the main organization promoting weapon regulations on humanitarian grounds (Mathur 2017), in the late 1980s and early 1990s, HRW branched into IHL-related work in Central America (Neier 2012). And with the success of the landmine campaign, new organizations became important players in humanitarian disarmament, including the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), Mine Action Canada, Landmine Action UK, and Handicap International. Organizations traditionally involved in peace and disarmament, such as WILPF and Pax Christi, became active on the new issues of banning landmines and later cluster munitions, or the creation of the ICC. Service provision organizations, such as Oxfam and Save the Children, also engaged in advocacy to ban landmines and cluster munitions.⁷

A couple of trends related to the NGOs' international political opportunity structure emerged. First, NGOs moved toward international-level campaigning and lobbying policymakers at the expense of grassroots mobilization and disruptive tactics. For example, the landmine campaign had a grassroots component and enjoyed public support, but compared to prior disarmament campaigns, it concentrated more on the elite level. The same aspect was even more pronounced in the campaign against cluster munitions. This reflected an understanding that well-placed political allies were key to NGO success rather than mass mobilization (Nash 2012: 134–135). The IR focus on NGO advocacy networks instead of social movements captures that distinction between routine and contentious politics (Tarrow 2001: 11–12), with the former becoming predominant in the post-Cold War disarmament field.

The landmine campaign brought about talk of “new diplomacy,” characterized by partnerships between NGOs and likeminded middle-sized states, reshaping international politics (McRae and Hubert 2001; Cooper, English, and Thakur 2002; Rutherford, Brem, and Matthew 2003).

According to activists, “such a partnership [wa]s a new kind of ‘superpower’”⁸ and the Nobel committee awarded the ICBL and its coordinator Jody Williams the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, praising the landmine process as “a model for similar processes in the future.”⁹ Indeed, in the following years, this kind of partnership advanced a host of initiatives in the broad field of human security, including the ICC statute, the 2000 Optional Protocol on child soldiers, the Kimberley Protocol on conflict diamonds, and the cluster munition ban (Krause 2008; Brem and Stiles 2009; Garcia 2011).

Second, past disarmament campaigns focused on the two superpowers. The latter’s actions were ultimately indispensable for disarmament. In the post-Cold War period, NGO advocacy took a roundabout route. In the face of resistance to stronger international norms by the big military powers, NGOs chose to forge ahead with developing new norms (Brem and Stiles 2009) in the expectation that, once established, they would gradually bind the big powers. Codification of new legal norms was coupled with efforts to stigmatize behavior that did not comply with them. This strategy allowed fast normative development, but also raised criticisms that the new norms were largely irrelevant – binding only for countries that never go to war. As in the preceding cases, it can be said that NGO campaigns failed to produce immediate policy effects where it mattered most (Davies 2014: 160–161). Moreover, according to critics, banning indiscriminate, low-tech weapons has indirectly legitimized high-tech Western militarism and limited the scope of disarmament (Beier 2011; Cooper 2011). However, the NGO strategy succeeded in stigmatizing the use of landmines (Price 1998b, 2004; Bower 2015, 2017), and more recently, cluster munitions (Petrova 2018). In both cases, the weapons have become controversial, their use has been widely condemned, and the US has been in de facto compliance with most treaty provisions.

Finally, the success of the above campaigns depended on depoliticizing the issues and NGO distancing from the total disarmament and peace agenda (Carpenter 2014; Nash 2012). Yet, the less ambitious path of banning concrete weapons, such as landmines and cluster munitions, ultimately offered a template for stigmatizing nuclear weapons as well. Whereas engaging the great powers for decades had only led to limited weapons reductions, prohibiting nuclear weapons without the participation of nuclear-weapons states became a bold step toward eliminating their menace. On the template of the landmine campaign, a new organization, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), was launched by IPPNW, Australia in 2007 with the idea to set a worldwide network of organizations to work for a treaty banning nuclear weapons. It incorporated NGOs traditionally focused on nuclear disarmament, such as CND in the UK and WILPF, and later others, such as Pax Christi, the Nobel Women’s Initiative set up by Jody Williams, and Article 36, related to the landmine and cluster munition campaigns, that proved pivotal in reorienting the campaign from a nuclear weapons convention including the nuclear powers toward a treaty without them.

ICAN emerged at a time when political opportunities for nuclear disarmament seemed to open up. In 2007, former secretaries of state George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former defense secretary William Perry, and Senator Sam Nunn published a letter urging the US to work for the elimination of nuclear weapons (Lewis 2017). President Obama pledged to work for a nuclear-free world during and after his presidential campaign. In 2008, the UN Secretary General called upon nuclear-weapons states to “undertake negotiations on effective measures leading to nuclear disarmament.”¹⁰ In 2009, President Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in the expectation that bold deeds would follow his words. In 2010, the ICRC President also called for an international treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons. The 2010 NPT Review conference focused the energies of NGOs and governments looking for action toward nuclear disarmament. However, the conference closed without a meaningful disarmament breakthrough, with the START treaty negotiated earlier between the US and Russia remaining the only significant step forward.

This lack of progress redirected NGO and government energies from 2013 on toward a new process focused on the humanitarian consequences of incidental or purposeful use of nuclear weapons, pushed along by Austria, Mexico, South Africa, and initially Norway (Borrie 2014). In December 2014, it culminated in a pledge by the Austrian government calling upon states to “fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons.”¹¹ In 2016, a UN General Assembly resolution recommended negotiations for a nuclear ban treaty, which was eventually adopted in July 2017 with the votes of 122 states. ICAN served as the NGO partner pushing the issue forward, relying on testimonies by survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and nuclear testing and direct lobbying of government officials, eschewing mass protests and outsider strategies. For its efforts, it received the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize.

The practical effects of the new treaty are still to be seen, as not only nuclear-weapons states, but all NATO countries and those relying on a “nuclear umbrella” opposed it. It has also raised concerns about polarizing further relations between non-nuclear-weapons states and nuclear-weapons states and weakening the NPT regime (Müller 2017). However, the treaty fits in the larger trajectory of delegitimizing (nuclear) weapons through the creation of legal and normative stigma (Tannenwald 2007) and has already contributed to changing the discourse on nuclear weapons and led to disinvestment in nuclear weapons producers (Acheson 2018).

The peace movement and the 2003 Iraq War

The prospect of war against Iraq triggered possibly the largest peace protests in history on 15 February 2003 (Cortright 2008: 172). In contrast to the peace movement during the Vietnam War, they were also transnational in scope and organization, illustrating the change from largely domestic-based NGO work to transnational campaigns. In the US, three organizational strands come together – Act Now to Stop War and End Racism was an anti-imperialist coalition, the United for Peace and Justice brought together grassroots organizations focusing on social justice, and the centrist Win Without War engaged in online mobilization and congressional lobbying (Cortright 2014: 497). The overall campaign was heavily influenced by the global justice movement and the world social forums that spread after the 1999 Seattle protest against the WTO (Verhulst 2010: 10–13; Tarrow 2015: 191). Arguably, the “war on terrorism” context following 9/11 and the Bush administration’s conservative and unilateral politics shrunk the activists’ political access and opportunities for action within institutional channels.

The resulting mass protests even led some journalists to declare that the antiwar movement had become a world “superpower.” Yet, it failed in its direct objective of preventing the war. After the war started, the “rally ’round the flag” effect kicked in, opportunities for protest shrunk, and by 2006 the movement largely dissipated into campaigning on other issues and in the US entered institutionalized politics by supporting the Democratic Party in congressional elections and Obama’s presidential campaign (Tarrow 2015: 193–195; Cortright 2014: 498–499; Heaney and Rojas 2011, 2015). In other countries it may have strengthened the domestic position of political actors opposed to the war; for example, Gerhard Schroeder’s reelection in Germany or Turkey’s denial of US overflights (Cortright 2008: 172–173). Yet it is difficult to estimate the add-on effect of the organized movement. According to Cortright (2008), the antiwar movement and the UN reinforced each other in opposing the war and this was the movement’s main effect – delegitimizing the war by withholding UN Security Council approval. Ultimately, Cortright credits the antiwar movement with the “Iraq syndrome” and backlash against US interventionist policies. Although one needs to separate the movement influence from other factors, the case shows again that NGOs have achieved moderate or few

policy changes in the fields of disarmament and peace, respectively, but have exerted stronger influence over broader norm developments and societal attitudes.

Conclusion

Domestic and international political opportunities mediate NGO influence on peace and disarmament issues. However, NGOs have also managed to reshape public attitudes toward war and the permissibility of particular weapons, and to gradually change the political opportunities in which they operate. During the Cold War, peace and disarmament organizations were diverse, broad-based, relying on grassroots mobilization, and when faced with closed domestic structures used mass protests or sought roundabout ways to foster disarmament by establishing transnational epistemic communities of scientists and physicians in the West and the East. During this period, in the US, liberal organizations also pursued “respectable” politics, lobbying politicians, and promoting moderate positions, such as the bilateral freeze in the 1980s. Although they often failed to reach their immediate objectives, NGOs still restrained state policies, spurred international treaties, such as the PTBT, and contributed to stigmatizing nuclear weapons and aggressive war. Their biggest, if indirect, achievement was in creating the ideational premises and transnational links that made the end of the Cold War possible.

As organizations gained access to policymaking, they became more professionalized and less radical – a trend intensified by the opening of new international opportunities after the end of the Cold War. A more permissive security environment refocused NGO efforts toward the creation of international legal norms in partnership with middle-sized states. While their specific goals became more circumscribed (norms without formal great power support), NGOs’ broader objectives remained to indirectly bind the great powers, especially the US, to the new norms. The success of NGOs in the post-Cold War period was facilitated by their humanitarian reframing of weapons issues and partnership with middle-sized states. NGOs used “naming and shaming” to stigmatize indiscriminate weapons and pressure states to comply with the new norms. Importantly, through their advocacy NGOs gained better access to international institutions and participated actively in treaty-making, campaigning for ratification, and later monitoring treaty compliance. As a result, they have widened the political opportunities at the international level and used them to push new legal developments related to humanitarian disarmament and exert pressure from above on states resistant to them.

Thus, NGOs have become not only agenda-setters working through states and international intuitions, but also active participants in security governance. More research remains to be done on the ability of NGOs to influence non-state actors, such as banks, business companies, and non-state armed groups – recent targets of NGO campaigning on humanitarian disarmament. Attention should also be paid to larger questions about how NGO professionalization affects the ability of civil society to pursue a more comprehensive peace agenda and the impact of norm-creation without the great powers on the strength and stability of the international legal and normative orders.

Notes

- 1 Goals may also be organizational, such as increasing membership, funding, or position vis-à-vis other NGOs without necessarily contributing to an organization’s policy goals.
- 2 Chatfield (2004) provides an overview of the historical literature.
- 3 Antiwar protest formed part of the 1960s student movements in Western Europe, but there were few transnational connections. Actions inspired by the American antiwar movement were launched in the UK and Australia, for example. See Ellis (2014), Piccini (2016).
- 4 On the antiwar movement of soldiers and veterans, see Cortright (2005), Moser (1996), Hunt (1999).

- 5 Intervention in Central America energized peace organizations on a smaller scale (Smith 1996).
- 6 The 1985 and 1995 Nobel Peace prizes of IPPNW and the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, respectively, recognized their roles in bridge-building between the West and the East.
- 7 Davies (2014: 162) notes the general trend toward homogenization of NGO activities and advocacy by previously service-oriented organizations.
- 8 Jody Williams, "Nobel Lecture," 10 December 1997, www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1997/williams-lecture.html.
- 9 "Press Release – Nobel Peace Prize 1997," www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1997/press.html.
- 10 "Press Release, SG/SM/11881-DC/3135," 24 October 2008, www.un.org/press/en/2008/sgsm11881.doc.htm.
- 11 "Pledge presented at the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons," www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Aussenpolitik/Abruestung/HINW14/HINW14_Austrian_Pledge.pdf.

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