

Lift the Ban!

The Historical De-Proscription of Resistance Organisations

June 2026



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“When the ANC says that they will target British companies, this shows what a typical terrorist organisation it is. [...] I will have nothing to do with any organisation that practises violence. I have never seen anyone from ANC or the PLO or the IRA and would not do so.”

Margaret Thatcher

former UK Prime Minister, on calls to target British companies for their complicity in South African apartheid.¹



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Proscription as a Tool of Colonial Control



01

Proscription as a Tool of Colonial Control

The proscription – or legal banning of organisations as terrorist groups – has been used as a tool of colonial control for decades.²

Since its inception, the British Empire weaponised colonial laws to ban, outlaw, and exile resistance organisations attempting to liberate their land from British colonialism.³

The British empire utilised proscription as one of the central legal mechanisms to undermine the rights of colonised peoples to self-determination and to resist foreign occupation by all means necessary.⁴

In this way, proscription serves to enforce respectability politics upon oppressed peoples by dictating morality and attempt to maintain state monopoly over violence.⁵

The UK historically instrumentalised proscription legislation most extensively against South African and Irish liberation movements, namely the African National Congress (ANC) and IRA (Irish Republican Army), to weaken their popular support.⁶

In 1987, then UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher described the ANC as “a typical terrorist organisation”, specifically in response to the ANC’s commitment to targeting British companies complicit in upholding apartheid, again emphasising the role of proscription as a colonial tool by the British state.¹¹

In 2006, Britain’s global interference through terror legislation was expanded to include extra-territorial jurisdiction, enabling the banning of groups that operate outside of Britain’s borders, despite such groups posing no direct threat to the UK.⁷ This expansion laid the foundation for Britain’s proscription of Palestinian liberation organisations, despite these organisations’ operations exclusively targeting the arms of the Zionist entity.⁸

Like all colonial tools, the imperial boomerang returns to Britain by infringing upon the right to free speech and expression, undermining democracy, and inhibiting British people’s ability to show solidarity and express support for liberations struggles.⁹

“The Zionist state is a settler enclave like any other. [...] In implanting and backing white settlers in South Africa and Zionist settlers in Palestine, the British Empire was founding two little pockets of settler-colonists who would owe allegiance to the imperial metropolis and would serve as bases of operations when the need arose.”

Abdelwahab Elmessiri
Egyptian scholar and author.¹⁰



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The Proscription of the ANC



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02

The Proscription of the ANC

The African National Congress (ANC) is a political party in South Africa, founded in 1912 as a liberation movement opposing racial oppression and apartheid in the then British colony of South Africa.¹²

The ANC's struggle intensified following the legalisation and intensification of the apartheid system in South Africa from 1948 onwards.¹³

The ANC recognised the necessity and legitimacy of armed struggle as means to achieve liberation from colonialism, engaging in a campaign of guerilla resistance against the more powerful apartheid state.¹⁴

In 1960, when South Africa was still within the fold of the British Empire, the apartheid government of South Africa declared the ANC to be an 'unlawful organisation', in direct response to rising direct action against apartheid.¹⁵

The ban was also intended to destroy the movement's huge rise in popularity, with over 100,000 members joining the ANC in the years prior to its proscription.¹⁶

The ANC's resistance to apartheid was one of the central factors in bringing global attention to the plight of black South Africans and other people of colour in the nation.¹⁸

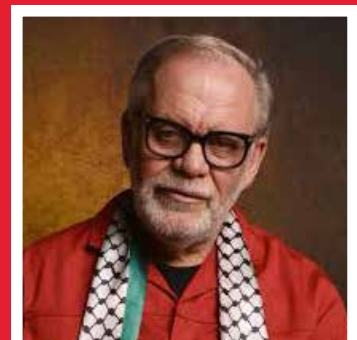
Following the ban, South African resistance intensified through defiance campaigns, international boycotts, and the move toward armed struggle, as peaceful protest was met with increasingly violent state repression.¹⁹

It is important to note that the establishment of the ANC's military wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), in 1961, was a response to this ban.¹⁷

“You cannot say to the people of Palestine, under the circumstances of the terrible provocation, under the circumstances of the genocide that is being committed and the years of suffering they had to face, that they do not have the right to take up arms and fight for their future and survival.”

Carl Niehaus

a former freedom fighter in South Africa and a member of the armed wing of the ANC.²⁰



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Lift the Ban: Protesting the Proscription of the ANC



03

Lift the Ban: Protesting the Proscription of the ANC

Despite thousands of arrests, anti-apartheid activists continued to openly defy the ban and the ANC continued to operate clandestinely inside South Africa and openly from exile.²¹ The banning led to years of militant resistance, contributing to subsequent uprisings like the 1976 Soweto Uprising.²²

In response to the banning, the ANC transitioned from exclusively non-violent resistance to a policy of armed struggle and established its armed wing, MK.²³

Over the next 18 months, the MK managed about 200 acts of sabotage, with Nelson Mandela playing an important role in organising the group.²⁵ He also started making plans for MK to get training outside of South Africa.²⁶

By imprisoning leaders of MK and the ANC, most notably Nelson Mandela, the apartheid government was able to break the strength of the ANC inside South Africa.²⁷ The ANC however succeeded in increasing international criticism of apartheid through its efforts abroad.²⁸

Globally, the anti-apartheid movement, particularly in the UK, organised mass demonstrations under the banner of ‘lift the ban’.²⁹ A major “March Month” boycott action was launched in London on 28 February 1960, featuring ANC officials and international allies protesting the ban.³⁰

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the ANC built extensive connections with other liberation movements in exile, notably the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), who provided military training for the MK.³¹

In 1979, ANC leader in exile Oliver Tambo would state: *“Imperialism recognises that even in southern Africa and in Palestine, naked colonial rule can no longer be maintained. The colonised peoples themselves are demonstrating in practice and in full view of the imperialists themselves, **that they are determined to achieve victory or to perish in the pursuit of that victory.** [...]”*

The critical factor that confronts imperialism is that its antagonists as represented by the PLO in Palestine, SWAPO in Namibia, the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe and the ANC in South Africa represent a future that is not anti-colonial merely but anti-imperialist as well. These liberation movements are the midwives of a future which will be characterised by the transfer of all power to the people. [...]

It would be of little moment to the racists of southern Africa, the Zionists in Israel and their international allies if these organisations represented a minority tendency on the fringes of a largely so-called “moderate” broad liberation movement.

*The fact however, is that **these movements are the genuine representatives of their peoples. They constitute the core and the vanguard of the liberation forces of their respective countries without whom and against whom no just and lasting solutions of the fundamental problems of the Middle East and southern Africa are possible.**”³²*

The proscription of the ANC was a critical juncture in South Africa’s history of resistance against apartheid.³⁴ Whilst intended to marginalise and dismantle the organisation, the repressive measure bolstered the ANC’s determination, catalysing a shift towards armed resistance and cultivating domestic and international solidarity.³⁵

“The people’s patience is not endless. The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom. The government has interpreted the peacefulness of the movement as weakness; the people’s non-violent policies have been taken as a green light for government violence. Refusal to resort to force has been interpreted by the government as an invitation to use armed force against the people without any fear of reprisals. [...]

We are striking out along a new road for the liberation of the people of this country. The government policy of force, repression and violence will no longer be met with non-violent resistance only!”

The 1961 manifesto of the ANC’s armed wing, the MK, upon adopting the tactic of armed resistance.³³



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The De-Proscription of the ANC and Its Impact in Ending Apartheid

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SOUTH AFRICA'S PRESIDENT ENDS 30-YEAR BAN ON MANDELA GROUP; SAYS IT IS TIME FOR NEGOTIATION

SWEEPING REVISIONS

De Klerk Vows Freedom for Mandela Soon — Critics Hail Moves

By **CHRISTOPHER S. WREN**
Special to The New York Times

CAPE TOWN, Feb. 2 — President F. W. de Klerk today lifted a 30-year ban on the African National Congress, the movement that has been fighting to bring down white minority rule in South Africa, and promised that Nelson Mandela, who has been imprisoned for nearly 28 years, would be freed soon.

The moves were disclosed in a package of sweeping changes that Mr. de Klerk announced in a speech at the opening of Parliament today. [Excerpts, page 6.]

Mr. de Klerk's program, which went beyond what virtually all his critics expected, appeared intended to clear the way for negotiating the country's fu-



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The De-Proscription of the ANC and Its Impact in Ending Apartheid

As the apartheid regime faltered under escalating domestic resistance, economic decline, armed resistance, and diplomatic pressure, the unbanning of the ANC in 1990 represented an opportunity for the ANC to shift its efforts from resistance to a process of reconciliation.⁷⁵

The lifting of the ban on the ANC allowed it to operate openly, mobilise its grassroots supporters, and transition into a formal political party.⁷⁶

This paved the way for the release of its imprisoned leaders, including Nelson Mandela, who were instrumental in the negotiations for the dismantling of apartheid governance in South Africa.⁷⁷

This transition marked the beginning of a negotiated settlement that culminated in the 1994 democratic elections and the establishment of a constitutional democracy committed to equality, human dignity and fundamental human rights.⁷⁸

This underscored the failure of repression to maintain an unjust system and emphasised the necessity of inclusive dialogue in achieving peace and justice.⁷⁹

Following the lifting of the ban, the ANC participated in The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), which met from December 1991 until May 1992 as a forum to negotiate a new constitution and develop effective processes of consultation.³⁶ All parties were represented, but the ANC and National Party dominated the discussions.³⁷

In November 1993, the Multi-Party Negotiating Forum agreed to an interim constitution legalising elections to establish a Government of National Unity.³⁸

The ANC won South Africa's first elections in 1994, and has been in power ever since, marking the end of institutionalised apartheid in South Africa.³⁹

“The historic changes achieved in South Africa and Ireland emerged from the changed context created by revolutionary armed struggle, which then gave way to negotiations, and negotiated settlements. [...]

Palestine is the existential moral challenge facing the international community at this time. Regrettably, there has not been the same international momentum, [as there was with South African anti-apartheid activism in the 1980s] to date, around the Palestinian struggle.”

Declan Kearney

Sinn Féin Member of Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly.⁴⁰



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The Proscription of the IRA and Sinn Féin



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The Proscription of the IRA and Sinn Féin

By 1918, the main political party advocating for the unification of Ireland and the eradication of British colonial rule was Sinn Féin.⁴¹

In response to its growing popularity, the British colonial administration banned Sinn Féin, and its armed wing, the Irish Volunteers. Sinn Féin would continue to be banned until 1974 despite transitions in the governance structure and forms of armed struggle in the occupied north of Ireland.⁴²

Following the beginning of the Irish War of Independence in 1919, the Irish Volunteers would form the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which became the largest organisation engaged in armed struggle to unite Ireland.⁴³

The IRA and other armed resistance movements engaged in the struggle for Irish unification would be variously proscribed by British governments throughout changes in governance structure.²⁴

However, the banning of the IRA did not cease its activities, which escalated despite the ban, particularly from the 1960s onwards.⁴⁴ The IRA adopted guerrilla tactics in order to continue their resistance despite the imbalance in military power between the IRA and the British military.⁴⁵

The proscription of Sinn Féin perpetuated colonial violence in the occupied north of Ireland by preventing representation of the most popular political party and ideological position in the north of Ireland at the time.⁴⁶

There are currently fourteen organisations, including the IRA, that continue to be proscribed by the UK government as terrorist organisations in the occupied north of Ireland, many because of their role in the Irish liberation struggle to unite the island of Ireland and end British colonial rule of the occupied six counties.⁴⁷

“Resistance—from Derry to Gaza—is the only path to liberation. We will not bow to the blade; first comes justice, then everything else. Anything less is submission, a tactic often employed by colonisers who cloak their demands for compliance in the language of peace.”

Eman Mohammed

a Palestinian photojournalist from Gaza.⁴⁸



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The De-Proscription of Sinn Féin and Its Impact on the Good Friday Agreement



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The De-Proscription of Sinn Féin and Its Impact on the Good Friday Agreement

The de-proscription of Sinn Féin from 1974 onwards revealed the ineffectiveness of the UK's use of terror legislation in the occupied north of Ireland.⁴⁹

It was clear that it was impossible for the British army to militarily defeat the IRA, and that bringing the political wing of the armed struggle into negotiations would be the only pathway to reducing violence in the occupied north of Ireland.⁵⁰

Despite its de-proscription, Sinn Féin would continue to be largely excluded from negotiations until 1997, which was a large reason for the failure of negotiations in the occupied north of Ireland throughout the latter half of the 20th century.⁵¹

Despite its profound opposition to Sinn Féin and the IRA, the British State eventually engaged in dialogue.⁵² The start of talks with and the legitimisation of Sinn Féin contributed to the end of violence by recognising the popularity of the views Sinn Féin represent.⁵³

Sinn Féin's eventual inclusion in negotiations was a central factor in the progression of negotiations that eventually produced the Good Friday Agreement.⁵⁴

Even today, Sinn Féin received the highest number of first preference votes in the most recent elections in Ireland, both north and south of the border.⁵⁵

Many former IRA activists have gone on to serve as representatives for Sinn Féin in elections, and have been elected to positions of power.⁵⁶

The reduction of violence in the occupied north of Ireland has also been facilitated by the unenforceability of UK terror legislation.⁵⁷

In the occupied northern counties of Ireland, there are allegedly thousands of members of proscribed organisations, but the majority of members are not actively pursued by the Police Service of Northern Ireland.⁵⁸

This demonstrates how popular support can defang UK legislation by making criminalisation financially and practically unsustainable.⁵⁹

“Imperialism recognises that even in southern Africa and in Palestine, naked colonial rule can no longer be maintained. The colonised peoples themselves are demonstrating in practice and in full view of the imperialists themselves, that they are determined to achieve victory or to perish in the pursuit of that victory.”

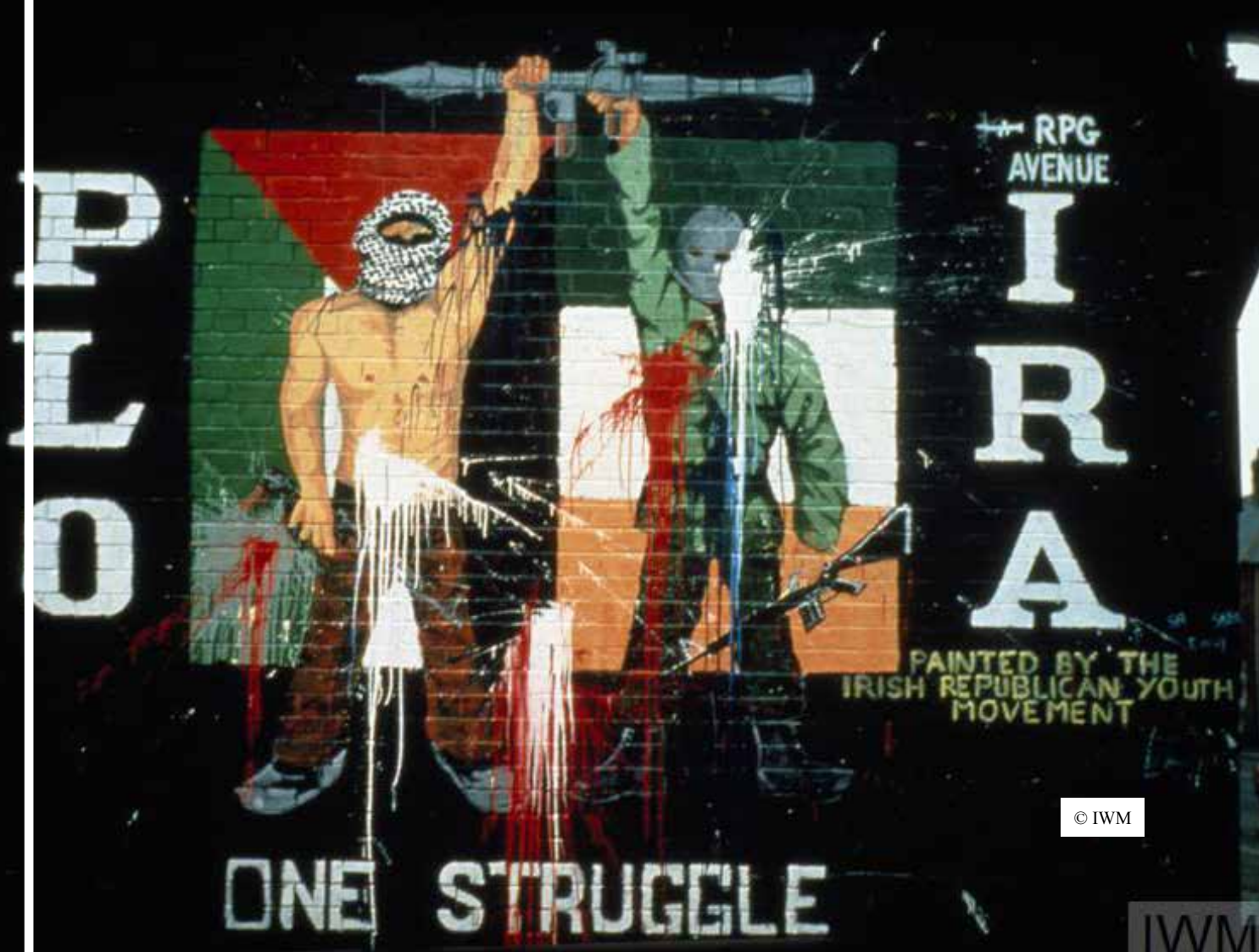
Oliver Tambo
former ANC leader in exile.⁶⁰



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Parallels between De-Proscription in South Africa, Ireland, and Palestine



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Parallels between De-Proscription in South Africa, Ireland, and Palestine

The struggle of Palestinians against Israeli occupation parallels key conditions that justified armed resistance in other historical contexts, including the ANC's struggle against apartheid South Africa and the IRA's struggle against colonial partition.⁶¹

The intensifying violence of Israel's occupation also emphasises the necessity of armed resistance.⁶² Like the ANC, which turned to armed struggle after decades of non-violent efforts were met with state repression, Palestinians have been subjected to decades of ethnic cleansing and genocide, despite their good faith negotiations through political and diplomatic channels.⁶³

Against this backdrop, armed resistance is a necessary response to a settler-colonial project sustained by military force and legal impunity.⁶⁴

International law acknowledges that people under colonial or racist domination have the right to engage in armed struggle to achieve self-determination when peaceful means are foreclosed, as is the case in occupied Palestine.⁶⁵

The Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) have repeatedly massacred peaceful Palestinian protestors, most recently during the Great March of Return from 2018 to 2019, when the IOF assassinated over 230 peaceful protestors and wounded thousands more.⁶⁶ This parallels the apartheid government's assassination of peaceful Black South African protestors in the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960,⁶⁷ and the British army's massacre of Irish protestors on Bloody Sunday.⁶⁸

Palestinians' right to armed resistance is further legitimised by the IOF's systematic targeting of Palestinian civilians, including children, necessitating armed struggle as a means of protecting these civilians from IOF attack.⁶⁹

As with the ANC, which targeted infrastructure and state security forces rather than civilians as a matter of policy, Hamas directs its resistance operations primarily against Israel's occupying apparatus.⁷⁰

As highlighted by the impact of the de-proscription of the ANC and Sinn Féin in achieving political solutions in South Africa and the occupied north of Ireland, the ongoing proscription of Hamas also creates obstacles for pursuing justice in occupied Palestine.⁷¹

The designation of the entirety of Hamas as a terrorist organisation has curtailed progress towards justice by marginalising a key movement in the Palestinian liberation struggle and democratic representative of the Palestinian population. It has also prevented any chance of meaningful dialogue with the Palestinian government in the besieged Gaza Strip, highlighting the hypocrisy of the West regarding democracy and human rights, and has contributed overall to the conditions that enabled Israel's genocide in the besieged Gaza Strip from 7 October 2023 onwards.⁷²

“The people that were under attack wanted to be defended and needed to be defended. Our right to resist was valid. [...] The Palestinians – in terms of their right to resist – is as valid as our right to resist.”

Martina Anderson
former IRA volunteer.⁷³



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Western Media Bias

© TalkTV



**HOW DO YOU
SLEEP AT NIGHT?**

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Western Media Bias

Ahistorical Reporting on the Proscription of Hamas

British media outlets have ignored the historical parallels between Hamas and the ANC and Sinn Féin in producing political settlements in South Africa and the occupied north of Ireland, instead attempting to undermine the legality and arguments of the legal application.

The Telegraph

Hamas lawyers must be struck off, says Robert Jenrick

BBC NEWS

Glorify Hamas and you break law, says UK terror watchdog

The Telegraph

Hamas uses ECHR to challenge terror group status

Western Media Bias continued...

sky news

Hamas: UK government plans to
proscribe entirety of organisation
using anti-terrorism law

B B C NEWS

**Hamas to be declared
a terrorist group by UK**

The EUROPEAN
CONSERVATIVE

**UK Islamist Group Pushes To
Take Hamas off Terror List**

“The British flag is called ‘the butcher’s apron’, because it’s drenched in blood. [...] The British government, they have described Nelson Mandela as a terrorist. They describe the Palestinians as the terrorists. We’re in good company.”

Martina Anderson
former IRA volunteer.⁷³



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