

Interview with Anarchist Union of Iran and Afghanistan

Abolition Media Worldwide

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As anarchists, what is your analysis of the threat of war occurring between the US and Iranian state?

Today, while we write this response, an American drone was targeted by the Islamic Republic, so now it's very difficult for all of us anarchists to provide a uniform analysis. We can only predict what will happen because we cannot observe behind-the-scenes communications between states and many other issues. Only different hypotheses can be considered and assessed. Your question is focused on what, as anarchists, what is our analysis of the threat of war between these two states? It must first be said, naturally, anarchists oppose state wars, but how does this opposition affect wars of states is another discussion. We will always remain anti-war. A war between states is at the service of states and capitalism, and the Iranian people must strive to put an end to this deadly war and conflict, and the state militia and infantry cannot go to war and must have their own independent line. It should not remain unsaid that a large part of the Iranian people are waiting for the Islamic Republic to weaken so they can dissolve the dictatorship and theocracy ruling Iran—and us anarchists will be alongside the people and in the streets and we will do whatever we can do for the revolution and the fall of the Islamic Republic. People in Iran have experienced the devastating 8 year war between Iran and Iraq; however some people in Iran have been reluctant to end the Islamic Republic after 40 years of atrocities and unfortunately, they have given assent to the US war against the Iranian state and see it as the easiest possible way to break the evil Islamic Republic. Although they know war will destroy all the infrastructure, they say that the last forty years of the Islamic Republic's record has been nothing less than war; it plundered the country's wealth, destroyed the environment, the lakes, and wetlands, brought the people of Iran poverty and misery, executed more than 100,000 people, and expelled 8 million, setting them adrift around the world.

You have criticized the defence of the Iranian regime by some Western leftists who call it “anti-imperialist.” How can revolutionaries effectively oppose both the fascism of the Iranian state and imperialist intervention?

The target of absolutist and state-oriented anti-imperialist critique is only American imperialism, but we are more open to this than some so-called anarchists or communists such as Noam Chomsky or Slavoj Zizek who defend the Islamic Republic of Iran. The silence of these intellectuals about the crimes of the Islamic Republic repressing the Iranian people and the severe crackdown on anarchists, Islamic Republic crimes against immigrants, especially Afghan immigrants (who are deprived of their basic human rights and have been slaughtered in the Syrian war for the promise of temporary residence in Iran), and the repression of women, workers, and students is unacceptable. In fact, Chomsky and his like are silent about the Islamic Republic because it is a state that appears to stand against American imperialism and if they are presented with the choice between the ruling government of Iran and the Iranian people, they will choose power. This is a tragedy because the power and authority that has crystallized in the Iranian government has conquered and fascinated them, and the fate of the Iranian people does not matter to them—and instead of always opposing power and defending individual freedom and the collec-

tive freedom, they are entranced by power and forget about freedom and opposing domination of the Iranian government; instead they examine this major contradiction through Marxist theory and not on the basis of liberty and anarchist libertarianism.

What historical revolutionary movements and figures are particularly inspiring or relevant for your movement today in Iran and Afghanistan?

The failure of state communism globally on the one hand and the failed, unsuccessful political developments in Iran and Afghanistan on the other hand led youth to gravitate toward liberal and libertarian alternatives that were new to them. The Internet, anarchist artists and anarchist activists abroad have helped in this process. Since we are anarchist militants, individuals and revolutionary movements close to our tendency are most relevant to us. But if we were to name some of them, we would include the Paris Commune of 1871, the Spanish Civil War, the Chicago anarchist workers, the Kronstadt sailors, the Black Army and Nestor Makhno, Emiliano Zapata, Dorothy Day, the AANES (Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria) and Abdullah Öcalan, the Chiapas Zapatistas, Japanese anarchists, Bakunin, Emma Goldman, Louise Michel, and Camillo Berneri.

As your website has published articles on the death of Lorenzo Orsetti and repression of Indonesian anarchists this past May Day, would you like to comment about these two important moments for the anarchist movement internationally?

So far, more than 500 international fighters have been killed in Syria fighting for the AANES and mostly in the war with ISIL. Many of them were our fellow international anarchists and Lorenzo Orsetti is one. We have always tried to identify international fighters who were anarchists fighting for our ideals to commemorate these comrades by introducing them to our audience and we emphasize that anarchists are idealists without pretensions and they are mostly anonymous and only called International Fighters, and main-stream platforms use it to deliberately hide anarchism so they do not advertise anarchists accidentally. Of course fallen anarchists do not care because they did not fight for power or fame, but to take revolutionary action. As you mention comrades, anarchist fighters in Rojava and the presence of anarchists in Indonesia are two significant historical moments, and it is very important to record these historical moments and our responsibility to highlight them. We emphasize the revolutionary nature of anarchists by calling attention to fallen comrades and encourage our young audience to radicalize.

Are there any new development in the situation of anarchist prisoner Soheil Arabi?

Anarchist prisoner Soheil Arabi was imprisoned in Ward 1, Hall 9 within the Greater Tehran Prison and is currently serving his 11 year prison sentence. He has been on a hunger strike to

protest the horrendous conditions in the prison, which includes: violent behaviour by prison authorities, the spread of drug use among prisoners, lack of prison maintenance and provisioning, confessions coerced with shockers and batons, not separating prisoners by crimes, absence of adequate accommodations and sanitation facilities, denial of right to treatment, and an infestation of bedbugs and lice. The hunger strike happened because the prison authorities ignored Soheil's repeated requests to address prison conditions. While performing his hunger strike, Soheil Arabi was transferred to the dispensary in the Greater Tehran Prison on June 20, 2019 after his health deteriorated severely. Farangis Mazloum, the brave mother of Soheil Arabi, was arrested in Tehran at her home on Monday July, 22 2019 by eight members of the security forces. She has been transferred to an unknown location. Anarchist comrade Soheil Arabi should have been released last year, but he was tried again last year in October and sentenced to another 3 years. After the last time he was tortured and beaten, he was not sent to the hospital despite a groin injury and broken nose. Recently, a 21-year-old political prisoner named Alireza Shir Mohammad Ali, his mother's only son, was deliberately killed by two other prisoners with a knife in the same prison—this is one of the methods the Iranian state uses to physically remove political prisoners. We are worried about comrade Soheil because there is no security in the Islamic Republic's prisons. Of course, besides Soheil, there are several anarchist prisoners in Iranian prisons. On May 1, 2019, fifty participants at a May Day demonstration, including women activists Neda Naji, Marzieh Amiri, Anisha Asadollahi, and Atefeh Rangriz were arrested and detained by security forces and have not been released. There are others that we cannot name for security reasons

What are some of the ways in which you have been organizing in your communities?

Anarchists in Iran and Afghanistan have clandestine activities that cannot be shared externally, because of the very dangerous security conditions, so that the secret police in Iran do not know how to fight anarchist organizations and do not know where we are operating. If we make our organizing, campaigns, and areas of activity public, then the Iranian state will focus their security institutions on them and create security traps. After the ten-day protests in more than 100 cities in Iran beginning on December 28, 2017, security agencies realized that people were organizing without leadership and, as a result, were at risk. Of course, when we began our activities 10 years ago, security institutions were at risk because since 1979, they had been able to suppress all of the opposition in Iran and quash them in the eyes of the people, and for three decades of repression, it was easy to imagine that no politics were attractive to young people and women, and that they were comfortable with the political structure, parties and currents. The regime was shocked by the emergence of new and fresh political currents, which on the one hand, was welcomed by young people, women and workers, and on the other hand, the regime itself had no knowledge about this new political thinking, its main activists, and how it spreads. For this reason, we and other political activists asked the questions: what would the regime do to counter the spread of anarchism through society? And what methods of oppression will they use to repress anarchists? Until the answers to these questions reveal themselves over-time, security agencies are opposing us and by using their Internet and propaganda facilities, they created a virtual faction and ordered them to create parallel organizations. By creating

a counterfeit political movement called “anarchism,” it destroys the anarchist movement and pushes teenagers and young people in the desired direction of the state.

What issues do you see percolating in Iran and Afghanistan that would make people more responsive and interested in anarchism?

In Iran and Afghanistan, cases such as patriarchy, religion, limited individual liberty, lack of social justice, ecological collapse and the extinction of many animal and plant species, the theocracy in Iran, and the lack of alternative, revolutionary opposition in Iran and Afghanistan. Anarchism is attractive because anarchist libertarianism and its emphasis on the importance of individual and secular freedom and radicalization, the importance of women’s rights, the protection of animals and the environment, the opposition to all hierarchy, and opposition to authority are all essential for Iranian society and strongly catches people’s attention.

How can anarchists in other parts of the world act in solidarity with the movement in Iran and Afghanistan?

We can say that so far anarchists in other parts of the world have been supporting the anarchist movement in Iran and Afghanistan very well, and shared our struggles through interviews and voluntary translation of interviews on their own websites in different languages. Our anarchist comrades supported Soheil Arabi and other actions that we cannot mention for security reasons. Because we are all anarchists, we have a deep interest in the global anarchist movement and in the vastness of the world, our range of struggles is wide and all anarchists face many anarchist struggles; however they do as much as they can for the anarchist movement in Iran and Afghanistan. In any case, the struggle continues and all kinds of anarchist support from the international anarchist movement will continue.

In the long term, how do you think anarchists can build stronger connections internationally to support revolutionary movements in a way that is not merely reactive to crises or repression?

Now the left movement and communist movement are facing a crisis, they do not have a strong presence at the international level or in international struggles, they have largely lost their revolutionary and militant characters, and even the parliamentary left is facing a crisis, even liberals face a crisis—but anarchists do not face this situation and they have not lost their revolutionary character and are still pragmatic. Anywhere in the world that has the smallest movement, the whole international anarchist movement focuses on it and stands up like in Syria, where several hundred international anarchists have fallen in the fight against ISIS alongside the SDF. Yes, we also think that in the long run anarchists can create stronger international ties to support revolutionary movements abroad. They should not only be involved in everyday struggles and should attract many other popular political tendencies and movements, as we do. This is the

very nature of the revolutionary and honestly also of anarchists: their pragmatism and the importance they invest in international struggles provides the groundwork for the practical support of revolutionary movements. The next important point is that anarchists from different parts of the world communicate with one another through their websites and email to share news about each other, which means they have a true and broader political worldview, and that they are quick to learn of problems and struggles, so they can rapidly support their international peers.

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