

# **Bring the War Home**

**Recovering Anti-Imperialism**

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# Contents

<b>VIETNAM: THIRD WORLD ANTI-IMPERIALISM VS LIBERAL HUMANITARIANISM</b> . . . . .	5
THE TET OFFENSIVE . . . . .	6
DAYS OF RAGE, BLACK RADICALISM AND ANTI-WAR MILITANCY . . . . .	7
“ACAB INCLUDES THE PEACE POLICE” – VIETNAM WAR EDITION . . . . .	10
“THE OBJECT IS NOT TO PROTEST. THE OBJECT IS TO MAKE A CHANGE” . . . .	10
<b>SOUTH AFRICA AND THE ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT: IT WASN’T ABOUT THE ORANGES</b> . . . . .	11
REGIONAL ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLES . . . . .	12
INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES AGAINST APARTHEID . . . . .	14
BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND ... ARMED STRUGGLE? . . . . .	15
<b>FROM BOYCOTTS TO AL-AQSA FLOOD: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE</b> .	17
REFERENCES . . . . .	17

*“We argued that the role of white people — just like our role vis a vis the Vietnam War was to find ourselves in alliance with the Vietnamese, in alliance with the black struggle, for self-determination. Not just for an end to the war, but the right to determine their own future.” – Bill Ayers, Ex-Leader of Weather Underground*

*(This zine was originally written during the short-lived “ceasefire” period between Gaza and the Zionist entity which has now been shattered by Israel, but it seeks to confront the debates in regard to the ongoing Palestine “rallies” vs direct action debates.)*

This essay is for fellow travellers who feel stripped of dignity. For those who believe solidarity cannot be built from paternalism. Who have come to see the weakness and futility of boycotts, marches and writing. For those of us who now sit between radicalism and defeatism, I write this with the hope that our collective actions can become more than the sum of their parts. In the midst of the relief and triumphant responses to the declaration of a “ceasefire” in Gaza – while the Zionist enemy and Palestinian collaborators rage through Jenin and the Zionist entity has now broken off hostage exchanges in favour of a continued holocaust by bombs in Gaza – I do not feel a sense of victory for my role in opposing Zionist colonial genocide, but one of failure. At the announcement of the short-lived “ceasefire” a woman in Gaza declared “We are the ones who endured and stood firm. There are no achievements to credit anyone, not any leader, not any official, not any country, the achievement is here.” She exacts truth upon the hollow social rituals we have come to term “solidarity”.

For all the talk of resistance, internationalism and the “interconnectedness” of struggle, the culmination of the Western Palestine Solidarity movement (outside of Palestine Action and a few Anarchist direct action cells) to face off against a Zionist apocalypse in Gaza can be summarised as: A to B marches sanctioned by the state, coordinated with cops and protest marshals to police ourselves into redundancy; unions that attend public rallies while defending their own members complicity in loading weapons for Israel or working on military vessels which coordinate bombings on Gaza; pickets which are not pickets but social club events; boat blockings where no boats are actually blocked; and “weird camping” on university lawns where, outside of specific displays of pig violence against students were quietly left alone for a few weeks and then dismantled with threats by university administrations without much pushback. I also do not believe that the argument in regards to “there is more state/police repression now than there was” is an effective excuse (there are always ways to subvert repression), or that such a claim is actually true. Student encampments in the U.S. were violently put down in 2024 by pigs, but the U.S. military open fired at a number of Anti-Vietnam War student protests in the 1970s, with a handful of students injured and shot dead on their own campuses. Infact the shooting dead of students was specifically cited by President Richard Nixon in response to the violent suppression of the Attica Prison Uprising a year after in 1971:

*“The president’s response: “This might have one hell of a salutary effect. They can talk all they want about the radicals. You know what stops them? Kill a few.”*

*“Remember Kent State?” the president continues. “Didn’t it have one hell of an effect, the Kent State thing?”*

*“Sure did,” replies Haldeman. “Gave them second thoughts.”*

If bullets and mass caging did not stop Anti-Vietnam War protestors, White Anti-Imperialist and Black Liberation warriors, then it must be asked what does that say of how seriously we comprehend what constitutes a “struggle” today?

The point of this essay is not to waste time chastising anyone because I think shame is not an effective motivator for action. What I wish to do is to convince you that we are in a moment that requires serious reflection and reorientation – and I respect the general feeling of burnout – where we must first honestly recognise our own failures before we can regroup. This is not about self-pity or blame, but to reflect on the fact that to face the material reality we are in, we must take this moment to reorganise ourselves for the coming battles ahead against Zionism, Imperialism and fascism. As George Jackson detailed on the eve of the counterrevolutions that would take his own life and the lives of many others within the Black Liberation movements of the early 1970s:

*“It is not defeatist to acknowledge that we have lost a battle. How else can we “regroup” and even think of carrying on the fight. At the center of revolution is realism.”*

This essay seeks to look at two examples of previous Anti-imperialist solidarity movements in the West so as to reintroduce radical history into our social movements. It seems that a lot of effort has gone into denying, erasing and forgetting the struggles of the past. Leaving us with theory and history that help to sustain counterinsurgency\* practices within our movements, or which reinforce an ideological defeatism where people have come to accept that “nothing more can be done”. The point of radical theory is not to accumulate books, quotes and martyrs like they are Pokémon cards. Rather, theory must be realised as a weapon\*\*, as revolutionary Pan-Africanist Amilcar Cabral understood. For the realization of theory adequate for the present moment, we must reconstruct our histories of struggle not for their own sake, but to understand it better on our own terms.

While attending a number of rallies in different cities since Operation Al Aqsa Flood on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023, I have heard two recurring examples cited for understanding the present moment: the Anti-Vietnam War protests and the Anti-Apartheid Movement. The argument has tended to go something like this: “just as with the Vietnam war and Apartheid South Africa, if we keep marching as they did, keep picketing as they did, boycotting as they did then we can force politicians to just stop supporting Israel’s crimes in Gaza and end its military occupation”. The problem with this presentation is twofold and both relate to broader issues of the Palestine Solidarity Movement in the West.

Firstly, the mass rallies we have seen much more resemble the Iraq War protests rather than the historical examples of the Anti-Apartheid Movement or the Anti-Vietnam War protests. The mass rallies against the Iraq war, some of the largest in world history, were a complete failure: Iraq was invaded, over a million people were murdered, tortured, disappeared or died as a result and the country’s political and economic system was restructured to suit the needs of Western corporations and U.S. Imperial designs. Why doing exactly the same thing would work now within the same parameters of “legalist” methods twenty years on, as governments continue to implement legislation restricting movement within such legal routes, is anyone’s guess.

Secondly, the idea that what ended the Vietnam War and Apartheid in South Africa were “peaceful” A to B rallies, boycotts and pickets in the West, is completely untrue. These are rather whitewashed histories. Reconstructed both by design through state, media and educational in-

stitutions to displace popular memory and revolutionary history. Reinforced by a particular triumphalism and arrogance repeated by a white dominated “Left”/Anti-War movement, which prefers what I refer to as a Liberal Humanitarianism — a moralising discourse where we in the West work through “civil disobedient” means in a democratic society to pressure governments to paternalistically “end war” and promote “human rights” or in this case enforce a “ceasefire” through international institutions — as opposed to Anti-Imperialism.

For myself, I understand Anti-Imperialism as rooted in the recognition that the inequalities between our movements and communities can only be abolished not through a deep-seated colonial paternalism, but rather in a joint opposition to Racial Capitalism emergent from our local conditions with shared risk and sacrifice in struggle. As declared by Mozambican Marxist revolutionary and FRELIMO president Samora Machel:

*“International solidarity is not an act of charity: It is an act of unity between allies fighting on different terrains toward the same objective. The foremost of these objectives is to aid the development of humanity to the highest level possible.”*

Contrary to a Liberal Humanitarianism which presents Palestinians, or Viets or South Africans merely as victims of senseless crimes — operating in deterritorializing and depoliticizing the struggles against racial capitalism, colonialism and Imperialism in colonized countries — Anti-Imperialism, rather, builds concrete solidarity through a material front which corresponds theory, propaganda and solidarity in support of national liberation forces on the ground. Which in this instance were the Viet Cong, the African National Congress and today Hamas and other militant Palestinian factions such as the Al Aqsa Martyrs and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. I intend to use these two examples as points of departure in which to interrogate counterinsurgent histories in favour of a lost, but reclaimable, strain of radicalism in Western Anti-Imperialist solidarity so that we are more able to make sense of the task that confronts us.

## **VIETNAM: THIRD WORLD ANTI-IMPERIALISM VS LIBERAL HUMANITARIANISM**

Go onto your search bar and type in “Anti-Vietnam War Protests” and take a look at some of the pictures. Think about the messaging and how this may be different to the messaging of much of the Palestine rallies we have seen over the last sixteen months.

You will likely see crowds of people with a variety of banners and placards such as “End the War Now” and “Bring the troops home.” You may also however see number of different banners and flags on display, with a message starkly different to much of those in the Palestine rallies we see today. The red and blue flags with the star in the centre held in a number of photos are the flags of the Viet Cong. Other banners and placards read “Victory to the Viet Cong”, “Victory to the Viet Cong: Defeat Imperialism Everywhere” and “self-determination for the Vietnamese.” By contrast, rally after rally over the last sixteen months has focused entirely on “civilian” casualties to the point where Palestinian resistance fighters are represented in an entirely different dehumanized category to Palestinian and calls for a “ceasefire” which depoliticizes the entire Anti-colonial struggle as if settler colonialism is not an ongoing war against the Indigenous. The framing of

the Palestine rallies and much of the discourse around Palestine has intentionally been premised upon a Liberal Anti-war paternalism that prioritises the rights of “Palestinians” as a generalised mass who have no agency and who need to be saved by our \*\*\*intervention. As Anti-Imperialist development scholar Max Ajl describes:

“What support campaign for a national liberation movement in modern history, has proceeded by accepting that you should have nothing to do with, even at the level of sympathy for, that national liberation movement ... noone ever supported the ANC on that basis. Noone ever supported the Sandinistas, or supported Nicaragua, on the basis of rejecting the Sandanistas. It would be absolutely ridiculous to abstain engaging with these forces.”

Not only does this narrative of human rights, illegality, dead children and ending war serve to disempower the ideology and historic process of national liberation in Palestine, it is a self-serving one. It divests social power to the very law and states which created, protected and arm Zionism for their own Imperialist designs and domestic models of counterinsurgency. It also divests our own responsibility to take a course of action which may require risking something more than walking around in circles chanting “Intifada revolution” for a few hours. This is where the currency of promoting counterinsurgent social movement histories becomes clear. If people in the Anti-Vietnam War protests or the Anti-Apartheid Movement merely marched from A to B, held some peaceful demonstrations on behalf of ending human rights violations and boycotted some oranges and this eventually led to the end of the war and Apartheid, then it means the struggle now doesn’t require us to break the law, risk prison time or a loss of social/class position. It doesn’t require us to question the basic pillars of our own societies premised upon colonialism (ongoing settler war, mass-incarceration and land dispossession upon Black and Indigenous peoples in America and Australia) and Imperialism (Britain’s ongoing support and involvement in bombings, invasions and military occupations of sovereign states across the South in the lubricating of circuits of global accumulation).

By contrast, it was understood by many involved in the Vietnam War protests that solidarity strategies were based upon materially assisting a people fulfil their revolt against colonialism – not that we in the West were ‘saving’ them. This was the ideology of Third Worldism and Anti-Imperialism, articulated by the Weatherman and Students for a Democratic Society in their call to “Bring the War Home” . It meant support for the concrete forces undertaking armed struggle and to follow their example, not just a depersonalised or disembodied ‘resistance’. The Weatherman declared bluntly, “It’s not so much that we’re against the war; we’re for the Vietnamese and their victory.”

## THE TET OFFENSIVE

By the late 1960’s opposition to the war in Vietnam was growing in the United States. The emergence of organisations such as the Black Panther Party and Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee would further the development of radical domestic opposition. However, one of the defining events which galvanised the growth of the protests and their more militant turn was not a sense of moral or political opposition to the war by Americans. Rather, it was the Tet Offensive of 1968 carried out by the Viet Cong (VC) in coordination with the PAVN (People’s Army of North Vietnam). It was the self-activity of the colonized that spurred on Anti-Imperialism in the West, and eventually victory.

The Tet Offensive was a major escalation in the Vietnam war wherein the VC and the PAVN carried out attacks against American and South Vietnamese (ARVN) military positions and cities in a hopes to stir social revolution against the U.S. backed client regime in Saigon and is recognised as the turning point in the war that led to the United States and Australia formally pulling out of South Vietnam in 1973. From a military perspective, the Tet Offensive was a complete failure. The VC and PAVN lost thousands of men over the course of the offensive, the intent of the assault to stir social revolution against the regime and American military did not materialise and the American and ARVN forces eventually retook most urban and rural areas that had been captured.

What the offensive did however, was demonstrate to American leadership and the public, which had been told that the United States was winning the war against the Communists, that this was a lie. After years of war and millions killed, the liberation forces were able to carry out effective and coordinated strikes across South Vietnam and American military positions and remained able to do so. In a sense, the Tet Offensive's most effective achievement was an instilling of ideological defeat upon the American state and military to continue supporting South Vietnam in a war that could not be won. The military offensive constituted the base for a war of position to be fought within Western states. The Viet Cong provided ideological energy to domestic counter-hegemonic forces confronting American policing, capitalism and white supremacy. The Tet offensive reinforced a Third Worldist/Maoist legend: the Viet Cong, an army made up mostly of peasants and with far less technical capacity, advanced weaponry and firepower, could outlast the most militarily sophisticated empire in human history. It was a major step in wearing down the Imperialists will to keep fighting. While military conflict continued in Vietnam, domestic counter-hegemonic forces from White Anti-Imperialists to Black revolutionaries could debilitate through socialised siege warfare their own governments through mass social, cultural, ideological and material contestation against Imperialism from within.

Because of this revelation, public opposition to the war grew immensely from 1968 onwards –and not strictly in the sense of an anti-war Liberal humanitarianism. This is how we must begin to understand Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and how we may coordinate our strategy towards supporting the Palestinian armed resistance on the ground.

## **DAYS OF RAGE, BLACK RADICALISM AND ANTI-WAR MILITANCY**

The Vietnam War protests emerged and escalated in a period of the late 1960s and 1970s alongside growing wars of national liberation on the African continent, urban guerilla warfare and Black radicalism. This generation of protest and opposition to the war, from the campus to the streets and community, was informed with a notion that the struggle against White Supremacy and police occupation in America was intimately tied to the Imperialist war in Vietnam and its occupation by American soldiers and military contractors. Huey P. Newton — co-founder of the Black Panther Party — even offered to send a cadre of Black Panthers to Vietnam to assist the Viet Cong, stating:

*“your struggle is also our struggle, for we recognize that our common enemy is the American imperialist who is the leader of international bourgeois domination.”*

That members of a largely above ground organization in America fighting for Black people understood their struggle against capitalist white supremacy as joined across the face of the earth to the peasant armies of the Viet Cong and were willing to fight and die for it, speaks to the commitment to Anti-imperialism which coursed through much of the Anti-Vietnam War movement.

Internationalist solidarity did not necessarily require international travel however – and this is important for our purpose. It is said that the Viet Cong replied to Newton, informing him that the struggle of the Panthers against American empire was best placed on their own territory. Other members of the Black Liberation movement such as Russel ‘Maroon’ Shoatz in fact criticized Newton on the same grounds (Newton himself came to regret the announcement), claiming that:

*“For those who wanted to fight or who were underground, he sent an open communique to the North Vietnamese government that he would make 1000 BPP members available to fight in Vietnam against U.S. forces. This was very odd to say the least. Of course the Panthers were highly supportive of the Viet Cong’s fight, but very few could see any reason not to show their support by stepping up armed action within the United States rather than on foreign ground. The Vietnamese government was of a similar opinion. They openly declined the offer, suggesting that the BPP could better help by supporting them from within the U.S.”*

Shoatz’s words align with escalation of domestic Black armed struggle as well as the growth of militant protest actions. Following the Tet Offensive in April 1968 came the famous occupations of Columbia University Buildings by members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Student Afro-American Society (SAS). Then in October 1968 the street protests began to escalate rapidly under the banner of The Weatherman and SDS:

*“Weatherman, now the leadership of SDS, rebaptized the demonstrations the “Days of Rage” and gave them a new purpose: “to establish another front against imperialism right here in America—to ‘bring the war home.’”*

The Days of Rage protests included riots and property damage targeting the cars and businesses of wealthy Chicagoans. Battles with police became symbolic of heightening militancy of opposition to the Vietnam war and the increasing police militarisation occurring across the United States against Black and Socialist resistance. They inspired a militancy which would continue to expand throughout the Anti-War movement through and beyond the United States formal evacuation from Vietnam in 1973. With the Weather Underground (and later the May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization) engaging in prison breaks of captured comrades (such as Assata Shakur) and bombing campaigns against the institutions of the state in opposition to Imperialism.

For the Weathermen, the call to “bring the war home” signalled the need to raise the social cost of the Imperialist assault on Vietnam upon the American state and its institutions. Recognising that peaceful A to B marches and rallies were fundamentally ineffective in that they accepted the terms provided by the very state to which was being opposed:

*“The sense that something more than demonstrations was needed coursed through radical circles on the eve of the November march. In FIRE! Weatherman charged that,*



*“Marches on Washington won’t end the war because peace marches ... can’t work in a fundamentally anti-democratic society.” According to Weatherman, the anti-war leadership “constantly held back the political and tactical growth of the movement”*

The call to bring the war home understood that American society and its institutions were bound up with support for the war on Vietnam and as such the necessary course of action was not merely to apply pressure to the government to change policy. But what was needed to truly commit to Anti-Imperialist support for the Vietnamese national liberation struggle was for domestic opposition to bring down the whole system responsible for the war in Vietnam.

Following such tendencies of a militant Anti-Vietnam War movement against the American establishment were the 1971 May Day protests in Washington D.C. These protests brought tens of thousands of anti-war demonstrators to the capital, a result of the culmination of weeks of anti-war activity in the city that spring. Though in contrast to the Days of Rage the protests were framed as “non-violent civil disobedience” the announced goal was to disrupt the basic functioning of the government. The immediate focus of the protesters was on blocking off key areas of the city, particularly points of traffic conversion, in order to prevent government employees from getting to work on Monday May 3, as well as the idea to storm government offices and buildings to physically prevent the carrying out of the everyday bureaucracy of state institutions.

The slogan of the protests was “If the government won’t stop the war, we’ll stop the government” and they became some of the largest mass direct-actions in U.S. protest history:

*“Small battles raged all over the city as demonstrators would build crude barricades, disperse when the police came and then regroup to rebuild the dismantled obstructions,” ... “We threw everything available into the streets,” one participant wrote afterwards in the Berkeley Tribe, “garbage cans, parked cars, broken glass, nails, large rocks, and ourselves.”*

In contrast to the forms taken in most of the Palestine solidarity protests we have seen, as well as the model of boycott and divestment framed by the BDS Movement, the method of strategy here was akin to a popular strike, if not insurgency, against the infrastructure of state bureaucracy which maintained Imperialist war in Vietnam. These protests were explicitly connected to the continued subjugation of domestic resistance through the expanding prison-carceral war on Socialist, Indigenous and Black resistance (the Attica Revolt occurred four months after this protest). By the end of May 3<sup>rd</sup>, after three days of protests, street blockades and deployment of the military, more than 7,000 protesters had been arrested across the city and placed in makeshift detention camps; 5000 more were arrested on May 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. These represent the largest mass arrests for protest in U.S. history. Ultimately, however, only 79 people were convicted of any offence related to the protests.

What the Days of Rage, the development of the Weather Underground and the May Day Protests generated was a generalised atmosphere of militant rebellion and possibility. The scale of disruption, the willingness of hundreds, if not at times thousands of people to put themselves on the line and the level of militancy which was understood the situation required stands in stark contrast to what seems today after sixteen months of rallies, pickets and fake blockades a generalised atmosphere of fear, disempowerment and defeatism. I think resistance breathes life into possibility and the lack of militant resistance has stifled our ability to be creative and

to imagine, to the point where the gap between theory words and radical practice is seemingly insurmountable.

## **“ACAB INCLUDES THE PEACE POLICE” — VIETNAM WAR EDITION**

What we think is possible is not merely stifled by counterinsurgent ideology, but rather the whitewashing of these histories informs and legitimates a practice of internal policing within our movements today. The structural policing of attempts at solidarity on the streets or at pickets by ‘activist’ and NGO leadership, union and party bureaucrats and most notably “peace police” protest marshals is legitimised through the denial and obscuring of the militant Anti-Imperialist movements of the past. Where throughout the last sixteen months people around the world have been wanting to take their opposition to Imperialist war and Zionist colonialism much further than has been allowed. Yet this has been stifled, repressed and targeted by self-anointed rally leaders, celebrity activists and protest marshals. Examples of this have stretched from the U.S., to Britain and Australia.

The counter-insurgent and honestly obnoxious role of marshals has been covered in depth elsewhere, so I won’t rehash critiques here. What I would like to do is briefly contextualise this ‘peace police’ lineage going back to at least the 1960s. Where just as they do today, Liberals involved in the Anti-Vietnam war protests openly flaunted their attempts to anoint themselves as the arbiters of legitimate protest. Training peace police to target protestors that saw escalation as a legitimate course of action against Imperialist war:

*“While the “March Against Death” was taking place, we were busily training marshals who would oversee the demonstration — that is, essentially be our own force of non-violent peacekeepers. We were rightfully concerned that groups of Weathermen-style protesters would disrupt our demonstration regardless of how creative our tactics were”*

Self-appointing and training your own anti-protest army – while people are on the streets attempting to combat the government-sanctioned obliteration of hundreds of thousands in Vietnam – collaborating with police repression and being proud of that – has deep parallels to plenty of rally-based organisations today. Obviously peace police are Liberal wreckers. The point here however is that our lack of militancy and of a consistent ideology of Anti-Imperialist internationalism, has allowed these counterinsurgent methods to become almost hegemonic throughout the Western Palestine solidarity movement. The result is a method of practice not conducive to the victories achieved by the Anti-Vietnam war movement.

## **“THE OBJECT IS NOT TO PROTEST. THE OBJECT IS TO MAKE A CHANGE”**

The various networks and organisations that made up the Anti-Vietnam war protests were not only idly marching from A to B each week, chanting Liberalised slogans in coordination with local police and state officials. Nor was the dominant strategy one which attempted simply to apply moral pressure to force an Imperialist government to change policy from its participation in

immoral acts for humanitarian reasons, while leaving the structures of Imperialism intact. There was an explicit recognition that the breaking of the back of American Imperialism in Vietnam was a necessary step to the destruction of American Empire and its brutal repression of poor, Black, Immigrant and Indigenous peoples at home. Such ideals must be reclaimed.

As Ben Morea, cofounder of the New York insurrectional street gang, Up Against the Wall, Mother\*\*\*\*er! — reflects on the militancy of the April 1968 student occupation of Columbia University that they participated in:

*“We were there to support the Black students and the SDS, and to some degree, the issue of Vietnam came up for us. But, overall it was a revolutionary act that was a way to bring about the realization that something was amiss and had to be corrected. It was just one part of our whole life. Yes, we wanted to destroy the university ... The object is not to protest. The object is to make a change. There is overlap with protesting, and some parallels exist. But the main thing isn’t to protest, meaning you are bringing pressure to bear morally. We didn’t want to bring pressure. We wanted to stop things.”*

## **SOUTH AFRICA AND THE ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT: IT WASN’T ABOUT THE ORANGES**

*“To the Cuban people internationalism is not only a word but something which they have put into practice for the benefit of large sectors of mankind ... The decisive defeat of the aggressive apartheid forces destroyed the myth of the invincibility of the white oppressor... Cuito Cuanavale marked an important step in the struggle to free the continent and our country of the scourge of apartheid.”* – Nelson Mandela

This is Nelson Mandela in a speech made in Cuba in 1991, with Fidel Castro and thousands of Cubans in attendance. Here he is talking about a battle most of us have never heard of, an armed struggle of which many who boycotted South African goods were likely not aware, in a country no one mentions as relevant to the story of the Anti-Apartheid liberation movement, yet nevertheless Mandela states was a pivotal event leading to the fall of Apartheid in South Africa.

As with Vietnam, we have been informed of a feel good story about protests against Apartheid South Africa that prioritises and credits us and our actions in the West through a largely peaceful “civil-disobedience” and boycott movement. It is a story where individuals, celebrities and communities, primarily in Britain and the United States but also a few other Western countries such as France and the Netherlands, boycotted South African goods such as Outspan Oranges and related sports and cultural events; pressured banks and local councils to divest funds from South African affiliated institutions and where trade unions engaged in boycotts, strikes and divestments prioritising a refusal to work with anything going to or from South Africa. It is these peaceful civil-disobedience actions, we are told, that were the primary motors that eventually led to the unbanning of the ANC (African National Congress), the release of Nelson Mandela and many other political prisoners and the end of Apartheid opening up to a democratic era in South Africa. Yet once again, this can be understood as whitewashed history with continuing counterinsurgent effects on contemporary solidarity with the Palestinian struggle today.

This presentation of events vastly overexaggerates the impact of Western solidarity practices within the Anti-Apartheid struggle while obscuring how Apartheid was overthrown and what

has led to the maintenance of economic apartheid and inequality in South Africa today. More importantly for the argument of this essay, this history obscures the related themes of Anti-Imperialist solidarity with armed national liberation struggles on the ground in Southern Africa whose actions were, in the words of veterans of the Anti-Apartheid struggle such as Nelson Mandela, Neville Alexander and Ronnie Kasrils, the primary forces which led to the fall of Apartheid.

## REGIONAL ANTI-APARTHEID STRUGGLES

The two driving forces which can be said to have defeated Apartheid in South Africa were, firstly, the “peoples war” struggle of the African National Congress and its military wing MK (uMkhonto weSizwe “Spear of the Nation”) and the PAC (Pan African Congress) constituting the mass struggle of Black South Africans and secondly, the African national liberation movements that achieved independence from Portuguese, British and South Africa colonialism forming the frontline states throughout the 1970s-1980s of Botswana, Zambia, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. While today Israel is framed as an aberration in its routine violation of the national sovereignty of its Arab neighbours and its bloody campaigns across the region in Lebanon, Syria, Iran and Yemen alongside its ongoing battles with Hezbollah and Ansar Allah; South Africa too routinely bombed, invaded and assassinated its way through Southern Africa in its attempts to destroy the ANC and destabilise sympathetic African governments and liberation movements. Unlike how it is often presented, the confrontation against the white supremacist Apartheid regime was not primarily seen as a single struggle within the borders of South Africa for the integration of Black human rights. The struggle against Apartheid was understood explicitly as a national liberation project against a white settler colonial entity which oppressed Africans across the continent, just as the Zionist Apartheid entity of Israel does across the Middle-East today.

As South African revolutionary and incarcerated intellectual Neville Alexander articulated, in reference to the revolutionary Azania Manifesto:

*“The immediate goal of the national liberation struggle now being waged in South Africa is the destruction of the system of racial capitalism. Apartheid is simply a particular socio-political expression of this system. Our opposition to apartheid is therefore only a starting point for our struggle against the structures and interests which are the real basis of apartheid.”*

In direct contrast to this, the Palestinian struggle has been presented across the Western Solidarity movement as a civil society campaign of ending the violation of Palestinian “human rights” of which Apartheid and settler colonialism are supposedly structured primarily to do. As opposed to Apartheid and settler colonialism being socio-economic and political structures designed to meet particular ends (denial of Indigenous sovereignty, capital accumulation through human and land wastage, exporting a counterinsurgency laboratory, buttressing Western Imperialism, quelling regional popular democracy etc.) This was the primary role of South Africa in the region and the reason why many Imperialist Western states, particularly Britain, continued to support the regime as an aspect of American Empire economically, military and diplomatically until it was no longer sustainable to do so.

As such, the Apartheid regimes battles against national liberation movements and independent ANC aligned states such as Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique were of vital importance to its eventual collapse and yield important historical parallels for us today. In supporting Portuguese colonialism in its death throes and the Apartheid regime of Rhodesia in repressing emergent African national liberation movements working alongside MK cadres, the South African regime was engaged in increasing wars, assassinations, security operations and military campaigns in order to suppress the rising tide of containment by Soviet-aligned independent African states which were engaged in direct diplomatic, military and technical support of the ANCs campaigns across the border into South Africa. The sustainability of MK and its underground networks relied directly upon the support of movements, networks and states spanning across the geographical borders of Southern Africa, just as is the case with AlQassam in Gaza today, with support from Hezbollah, Iran and Ansar Allah. While there is often a conscious attempt to strip Palestine from the struggles of the Middle East for national sovereignty and social development more broadly – and the armed Palestinian factions from “Palestinians” writ large – regional armed struggles and national liberation movements supporting the struggle of the ANC trapped the Apartheid regime in a prolonged social, economic, political and diplomatic crises that eventually led to its collapse.

These movements were supported to a large extent by the Soviet Union and China, with the Socialist state of Cuba playing a decisive role in the defeat of the South African military at the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, Angola, from 1987 to 1988. Seen as the decisive turning point in the independence of Namibia, the retreat of South African forces from Angola and the end of Apartheid, as Black Radical Historian Gerald Horne contends:

*“the ascendancy of communists and Social democrats in Lisbon led directly to independence for Mozambique and Angola in 1975 and proved inspirational in South Africa, leading to the Soweto uprising of 1976 and an acceleration of militancy that made the nation ungovernable ... In the preceding months of 1988 the Cuban forces and their Southern African allies unleashed a withering defeat for Pretoria at Cuito Cuanavale, which turned the tide in favor of liberation. Cuban pilots flying MIG-23 fighter jets of Soviet make proved to be decisive, further angering hawks in Washington. Israel denied that it was fighting alongside the apartheid military; others were not so sure. Whatever the case, it was downhill from here for apartheid with Namibian independence becoming more likely and the ouster of the humbled Nationalist Party veritably assured”*

In other words, the overthrow of Apartheid was not achieved primarily through an international “civil rights” campaign engaged in peaceful marches. Rather, it was achieved through an integrated peoples war supported by international solidarity networks – in 1978 a delegation of MK visited Vietnam and met with Vo Nguyen Giap, the former Commander in Chief of the People’s Army of Vietnam, to learn tactics and strategies for carrying out such a liberation campaign – that forced the Apartheid regime to overextend its capacities in confronting its multiple enemies both across the border and from within. Liberation struggles in Namibia and Angola, alongside growing social unrest and mobilization within South Africa itself, drained the apartheid state’s treasury. I believe such an end is prophetic in watching the Zionist entities endless colonial wars of expansion against embattled Anti-colonial forces across the region and in Palestine itself. But this is not inevitable, these conditions must be forged in struggle. To paraphrase Guevara, we must create two, three, many Palestine’s.

## INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES AGAINST APARTHEID

International solidarity with the ANC extended well beyond peaceful, symbolic and economic means and into clandestine operations supporting the guerilla war. Internationalist volunteers, co-ordinated directly by the ANC leadership in exile, undertook the role of couriers, transporters, weapons carriers, safehouse coordinators, cadre traffickers and in some cases enacted sabotage operations against the Apartheid Regime. Individuals from countries such as Britain, Portugal, Belgium, Canada and Holland led double lives across Southern Africa, carrying out tasks for the ANC underground as part of what came to be referred to as the Ubuntu brigades – a complex underground network in support of MK. Their proximity to whiteness was a crucial element in their ability to slip under the radar of the Apartheid regimes police and security forces: ‘white internationalists from Europe and North America were especially successful in getting material into the country with the application of the ‘reverse apartheid’ thinking where whites were generally not suspect and had freedom of movement denied to black people.’

As Kasrils details, particularly after the 1979 delegation to Vietnam, the ANC developed a model of people’s war that was summarised in the “four pillars of struggle”: mass political struggle as the primary element; reinforced by armed operations; an underground network capable of facilitating all aspects of resistance; and international solidarity. Kasrils describes how International solidarity was a crucial aspect of the struggle, but it was there to reinforce the armed and mass struggle of the Black majority in South Africa for national liberation from Apartheid, white supremacy and colonial domination:

*“We regarded internationalism as a major pillar of the struggle to overthrow apartheid. We had four pillars: politics was always primary, political leadership, political mobilization of the people, etc. [We believed] that that’s what would end apartheid, the struggle of the people of South Africa. That would be reinforced by an underground network that would distribute leaflets, help smuggle in weapons, and could give guidance to the aboveground organizations, social organizations, community, youth, trade unions, and so on, which were in the 1980s developing in quite an energetic way.”*

This was an alternative strategy to what occurred during the Vietnam War, where Western militaries were directly involved with troops on the ground in order to occupy and contain the Vietnamese national liberation struggle and as such militant opposition in the West was directed inwards towards peoples own governments. As South Africa was a white settler colony oppressing the Black Indigenous majority, the strategy of the international solidarity campaign took the form of cutting off life support for the Apartheid regime, particularly in targeting the importation of oil to South Africa which had no independent oil reserves, while volunteers participated further afield in aiding the struggle on the ground achieve their military, strategic and political objects of mass social upheaval. By the 1980’s there were hundreds of International Brigades operating discreetly across Southern Africa aiding the return of ANC cadres in exile to carry out clandestine operations. This was occurring alongside a resistance to Apartheid in Europe that began to take a more militant turn, with hundreds of targeted operations occurring against oil companies such as Shell, which continued to supply the Apartheid regime even after the UN Resolution on oil sanctions in 1987. This included but was not limited to cutting fuel lines, sabotaging Shell depots and in some cases the burning down of petrol stations.

The point here is less that there is a specific strategy that should be carried out by Western solidarity to confront Zionism either domestically or on the ground in Palestine. Rather, like with the Anti-Vietnam War protests, it is to demonstrate that there was a level of militancy and solidarity premised upon shared material risk and sacrifice with the Anti-Apartheid Movement that allowed the ANC to overthrow Apartheid that has been almost completely erased and pacified with the Palestine solidarity movement today.

## **BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT AND ... ARMED STRUGGLE?**

Like the pro-Palestine movement today, the Anti-apartheid movement engaged in boycotts, pickets, marches and workers' strikes. But these solidarity practices were co-ordinated in relation to supporting the ANC — alongside organisations such as SWAPO in Namibia — on the ground as it engaged in a practice of armed struggle. The cultural and economic boycotts of the global Anti-Apartheid Movement existed in tandem with weapons trafficking, sabotage, bombings and armed conflict against the military, police and security apparatus of the Apartheid state. These operated as parts of a systemic whole that made up the international Anti-Apartheid struggle in solidarity with the national liberation struggles of the peoples of Southern Africa.

The ANC had openly been engaged in armed struggle against the Apartheid state from 1961. It is not as if the international Anti-Apartheid Movement did not know about the ANC's armed struggle or the armed struggle of affiliated organisations such as SWAPO. MK had been founded as the military wing of the ANC by Nelson Mandela after the Sharpeville massacre against South African protestors. Mandela's imprisonment along with eleven other members of the ANC in the 1964 Rivonia trial were on the charges of sabotage and attempting to overthrow the Apartheid government through armed struggle. In fact, Amnesty International refused to campaign for Mandela's release because he continued to support the use of armed struggle throughout his twenty-seven year imprisonment.

It is understandable, then, why the messaging of the Anti-Apartheid Movement did not entirely reflect the slogans or the forms of strategy being taken today throughout the Western Palestine Solidarity Movement. It was not merely "free South Africa" but also "solidarity with the ANC." The Anti-Apartheid Movement understood itself and its strategy as materially assisting the African National Congress as the leading representative (but not the only) organisation of the South African people against Apartheid. Take for example the messaging of these Anti-Apartheid Movement protests in London in the 1980s and 1990s, where you can easily find placards and banners reading "Solidarity with the ANC", "Free Nelson Mandela", "Forward to Freedom in Namibia and South Africa" and "Solidarity with SWAPO."

This exists in direct contrast to the way in which the Western Palestine Solidarity Movement and more specifically the leadership of the BDS Movement relates to the Palestinian national liberation struggle. In the Liberal desire to be seen as legitimate in the eyes of Western politicians, NGOs and media, the BNC has gone out of its way to present the struggle as an integrationist one for Palestinian "human rights" — as opposed to one of national liberation — while disciplining solidarity networks which align themselves politically and strategically to the armed resistance factions on the ground.

The BNC has issued statements informing affiliated organisations not to express support for the Palestinian armed resistance — a move criticised by resistance organisations on the ground,

with the PFLP and the Resistance News Network releasing official statements condemning the statement and pointing out the BNC's lack of consensus and democratic legitimacy in its attempts to appeal to Western Liberal legitimacy politics:

*“All struggles for freedom around the world have seen various forms of struggle side by side, with armed resistance at their core. ... We call on the BNC to revise its position and align with the authentic national stance that glorifies resistance in all its forms.”*

Despite the BDS Movement providing South Africa as a key comparative example of Apartheid and the struggle against it, the leadership of the BNC, alongside many within the Palestine solidarity movement, actively engage in disruptive practices of internal policing of the movement in order to disconnect international solidarity and the mass struggle of the Palestinian people from the armed resistance factions — in direct contrast to the model of struggle in which the ANC engaged itself. The BNC has gone so far as to actively suppress the work of BDS networks, expending “significant energy attempting to silence support for Palestinian armed struggle and those who firmly reject all Zionists and normalizers”, both within and outside Palestine. Take for example the fact that the BDS Movement, or the Palestine Solidarity Campaign — Britain's largest Palestine focused NGO — has made no mention of Palestine Action in any statement — let alone support for the Palestinian armed resistance — even in articles which relate directly to the closure of Elbit Systems arms factories by PA's direct action campaign.

The BNC and the call for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions upholds the call of Palestinian civil society organisations, but this was an option taken by Palestinian society after the intentional depoliticization of the Palestinian national movement following the disarming of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in the early 1990s in trading for a “two state solution” in Palestine which was never going to materialise. The move from political organizations to “civil society” has allowed for a bloated NGO with limited democratic capacities and compromised political allegiances to present themselves as the primary identifiers of the Palestinian cause and authority on what constitutes legitimate pro-Palestine activism around the world. The promotion of Palestinian “rights” and the support for a generalised “free Palestine” with its primary focus on Palestinian “civilians” has been a specific strategy of counterinsurgency of the post-Oslo (1993 negotiations between the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Israel) period of the Palestinian Authority, “State-building” and “civil society” Western movements. It strips the struggle of a political content based in national Indigenous sovereignty, expressed by existing Palestinian factions where popular legitimacy clearly aligns with Hamas and not the neocolonial comprador Palestinian Authority.

After twenty years of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement, it is clear that the most successful event in forcing Israeli settlers to leave Palestine, in forcing hundreds of companies to shut down and financially crippling the Zionist regime, in releasing hundreds of Palestinian hostages from Zionist prisons, was operation Al-Aqsa Flood on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023. Despite the BNC's consistent attempt alongside many Western Palestine solidarity organisations to actively divorce themselves and the international solidarity movement from the armed struggle, the Palestinian political factions on the ground have demonstrated their resilience and capacity to represent themselves and the broader aspirations of the Palestinian national liberation movement.



## FROM BOYCOTTS TO AL-AQSA FLOOD: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE

The last sixteen months have demonstrated that the model of international support provided either to the Viet Cong or the ANC is not what is being exhibited by the Western Palestine solidarity movement. We must therefore work to reclaim and reinform ourselves of the nature of historical struggles so that they may effectively inform a solidarity in the present rooted in an authentic and material Anti-Imperialism.

An Al Qassam fighter has said “The only message I want to send to the Israelis is that bodies die, but ideas will never die.” But ideas can be repressed, obscured, mystified. As we have seen, Anti-Imperialist ideology and history continues to be whitewashed even amongst our own movements for the sake of self-serving narratives. The meaning and content of what constitutes solidarity and resistance has been so transformed, so redesigned by the NGO activist complex and self-serving Eurocentric and white histories, it barely registers that what occurs now in terms of protest and “political education” can be understood as the same set of practices and relationships that occurred and were formed during these symbolic historical struggles against Imperialism, capitalism and white supremacy.

I believe that living in the West not only requires of us a duty to stand against a system of capitalist Imperialism which maintains a world divided by colour and colonial exploitation for the benefit of (white) citizens in the North. I think more importantly, our placement in the West provides us with an ability which most people who suffer from the depravities of Imperialism around the world do not have, to strike at its heart. As we have seen, “ceasefire” does not signify an end to colonial war. But merely a renewed round of Zionist barbarism elsewhere, whether into Gaza, the West Bank, Syria or Yemen. The peace policing, the whitewashing of past struggles, the Liberal humanitarian moralism, the performative showcasing of a solidarity empty of concrete action – these are all designed to pacify the possibilities of a militancy and radical solidarity which is not only realizable but has been shown time and again to be effective.

Material solidarity means to raise the social cost of Zionism on the home Imperialist front. By reinscribing radical Anti-imperialist history into our theory and practice we can generate a militant strategy in coordination with the movements of the Palestinian national liberation forces on the ground, as they continue to wage war on Zionist colonialism. ‘Bringing the war home’ in essence, calls on us to abolish counterinsurgency from our movements in favour of aligning ideologically and practically with the AlQassam armed fighter and the Fellaheen rock thrower.

*“We were not strong enough to drive out a half-million American troops, but that wasn’t our aim... Our intention was to break the will of the American Government. ... In war there are the two factors — human beings and weapons. Ultimately, though, human beings are the decisive factor. Human beings!” – Vo Nguyen Giap*

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