

Towards Another Uprising

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At the end of 2010 an individual act of despair in the town of Sidi Bouzid ignited a daring, enraged, and joyful upheaval that travelled through North Africa into the Middle East and beyond. People defied the oppressive systems they had been immersed in for generations and came together in the streets to topple the political elites at their helm. The authorities, at first stunned by this courageous spirit that they couldn't understand, then unleashed a cynical and brutal response.

This defeat is still being inflicted on the people in the region, and is also felt all over the world by those who stood in solidarity with the uprisings but were mostly unable to overcome their powerlessness as the uprisings were massacred.

The horrors in the region during the last decade are many. To name some that stick most in my mind: Sisi has turned back the clock in Egypt to military dictatorship with the material support of the US. The regimes in the other North-African countries are paving over any sign of freedom while being coaxed by European countries to shut down the immigration routes over the Mediterranean. Without the murderous military campaigns of Hezbollah and the IRGC in Syria, Assad wouldn't have survived the uprising. The Iranian regime itself brutally oppressed three different uprisings in the country in the last decade. Most people in Lebanon are in a daily struggle for survival because of the greed of its political leaders while mobs at the orders of Hezbollah beat down street protests. Early on in the uprisings, Hamas, who has shot political opponents in broad daylight on the streets of Gaza, culled attempts at an uprising by rounding up protest organizers and threatening them with murder. Leaders in the region understood once again that they can use any means against the populations under their control without real push-back from outside. Indifference, cynicism and opportunism trump moral appeals, and strategic alliances are always in play. The world churns on. For those of us who have not looked away, how can we not see a connection between Assad bombing Syrian cities into obliteration and Netanyahu razing Gaza?

The authors of "Towards the Last Intifada" (Tinderbox #6) don't acknowledge these experiences of the last decade. Instead, they propose to join the opposing side of an American geopolitical alliance (keeping true to American centralism in their own way). According to them, the Axis of Resistance shows the path forward for anarchists to struggle against empire. This article seems to confound resistance with 'the Resistance'. That is to say, they collapse any form of resistance from people in Palestine, and more broadly in the region, into a particular representation,

adopting an umbrella term used by states, militaries, para-state/para-military organizations to describe their own activities. The authors of the article warn anarchists against being too sensitive to hierarchy – as if that is the only aspect of ‘the Resistance’ anarchists might find difficult to accept.

It is now a year after the bloody incursion of Hamas into Israel. Apart from discourse, the accomplishments of the Resistance so far are: Hezbollah has launched ineffectual rockets that have only inflicted significant damage on a Druze village, Iranian leaders are busying themselves with making appeals to the West to reign in Israel, militias in Iraq attacked a couple of US military bases in the country early on and then fell silent, while only the Houthis seem to have taken Nasrallah’s “Unity of Fronts” seriously. They succeeded in disrupting global shipping routes and have carried out some unexpected aerial attacks on Israel. In the meantime, Israel has wiped out the leadership of Hezbollah, drops bombs on Lebanon on a daily basis, has regularly bombed sites in Syria without retaliation, and commits executions in Tehran. The Axis of Resistance and the Unity of Fronts are mere slogans that obscure the strategic dealings among political, authoritarian organisations and states with their own (often differing) interests. It’s delusional to see it as something else. And Israel is calling the bluff of ‘the Resistance’ with an exponential military escalation.

Israel’s massacres in Gaza, with the material support of the Western countries, are relentless. The apartheid regime in the West Bank and Israel has been built up for decades, leaving almost no oxygen to breathe for those living under its control. Faced with this bleak reality and an overwhelming powerlessness to put a stop to it, anarchists may be looking for an effective resistance (or rather, as it appears, an image of one). But if we want to fight against oppression, we can’t be content with any opposition. Choosing to join one authoritarian, militaristic system against another will not put an end to the horrors of this world – neither in this conflict nor in any other. It is neither inherently defeatist or a sign of privileged indifference to refuse to take sides between warring groups and states. That conclusion can only be reached if we would reduce reality to simplistic representations. Instead, by being open to complexity and specificity, anarchist action can be a liberating endeavor. It is here that we can find affinities, build relationships on a different basis, and muster the strength and courage – or perhaps, humility and passion – to attack. Anarchists find their effectiveness when they can undermine and destroy oppressive systems. We will not find it in a military prowess which, at the end of the day, produces more oppression and misery. And so those that have a spirit of their own and a memory of past rebellions will fight for another uprising.

*From the northern coast of the Mediterranean, with a heavy heart and a soul on fire
Early October, 2024*

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