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Anti-imperialism of the Idiots

How Western Campists and Tankies Align with the
Axis of Resistance

Decolonize Anarchism

January 25, 2025

Following Iran's rocket and drone strikes on the Israeli apartheid regime on April 13th, authoritarian leftists in the Global North once again turned a blind eye to the struggles of oppressed peoples. Instead of focusing on the class struggles of the people, they centered their political analysis on states, offering support to oppressive regimes, and extolled the Iranian regime and the Axis of Resistance.

For these authoritarian leftists (campists and tankies), Iran is praised as the leader of the "Axis of Resistance" against both the US Empire and Zionism, disregarding the regime's history of torturing, raping, and killing hundreds of thousands of its own people. During the 2022 "Jin Jiyan Azadi" uprising, at least 550 protesters were killed by the Iranian regime, including 49 women and 68 children, and thousands were injured. In detention, state authorities tortured, and raped protestors to extract confessions or punish them. More than 700 executions occurred in Iran between January and November 2023, predominantly affecting individuals from the Kurdistan and Baluchistan regions.

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During this uprising, at least 82 Baloch protesters and bystanders were killed by the state in a crackdown known as Bloody Friday. The Baloch people in Iran live in absolute poverty and are denied fundamental human rights. They are stateless people in their own country; they do not have access to birth certificates, water, education, and healthcare. Baloch children drown in Hootag (water ditches) daily while trying to get water for their families. The lack of employment prospects forces people to turn to smuggling fuel.

During the April 13th attack, the regime launched widespread drone and missile attacks from within its cities, causing panic among the Iranian populace, compelling people to flee, and preventing potential uprisings in the event of war. Concurrently, during this attack, the regime intensified its suppression and arrest of women disobeying the mandatory hijab law. This law is not only the state's apparatus to control women's bodies but also to increase the presence of security forces, quashing any possible revolts.

Authoritarian leftists in the West lack nuance and fail to grasp the historical and political dialectics of Southwest Asia. As a result, they overlook the crimes of authoritarian and theocratic states like Iran, glorifying them for their anti-imperialism. This phenomenon, termed "The Anti-imperialism of the Idiots" by British-Syrian author and activist Leila Al-Shami, highlights the activity of a large part of the Western "anti-war" left during the Syrian war. They only opposed Western interference while ignoring or even supporting the engagement of Russia and Iran. "For this authoritarian left, support is extended to the Assad regime in the name of "anti-imperialism." Assad is seen as part of the Axis of Resistance against both the US Empire and Zionism. It matters little that the Assad regime itself supported the first Gulf War or participated in the US illegal rendition program where suspected terrorists were tortured in Syria on the CIA's behalf. This pro-fascist left seems blind to any form of imperialism that is non-western in origin. It

combines identity politics with egoism. Everything that happens is viewed through the prism of what it means for westerners – only white men have the power to make history.”

The “campist” views the US, Europe, and the Israeli occupation government as the “imperialist camp,” while Russia, China, Iran, Syria, North Korea, Venezuela, and other countries are the “anti-imperialist camp.” Regardless of how much their regimes abuse human rights or how totalitarian they are, the latter camp is always backed. Everyone who rhetorically challenges the imperialist narrative is viewed as an ally. Therefore, in the perspective of campists, it is frequently sufficient for a cause to be rhetorically “supported” by the United States in order for it to be immediately discredited.

Within this framework, many failed to support the popular revolution that occurred in Syria in 2011 or Iran in 2022, instead supporting the tyrants in Syria and Iran, who were falsely depicted as opposing U.S.- engineered regime change. The anti-imperialist left took at face value the Syrian and Iranian regime’s claims that it is one of the last bastions of resistance against Western and Israeli hegemony.

On October 17, 2019, the people of Lebanon took to the streets to challenge the country’s sectarian political system, calling for an overhaul of the regime. In response, Hezbollah and its allies, often working alongside government forces, suppressed the demonstrators. Despite the broader scope of the Lebanese protests, Hezbollah, under Nasrallah’s leadership, was quick to defend the sectarian status quo, discrediting the demonstrators by accusing them of being manipulated by foreign interests. This scenario is familiar to Iranians, who endure similar repression from a regime that supports Hezbollah’s influence. Following the brutal killing of Jina Amini by the Iran’s morality police ignited a nationwide revolt against the regime, marked by direct confrontations with government officials.

This movement highlights the extensive spread of oppressive methods across the region, methods that Iran has exported to Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq since the time of Khomeini and which

have intensified with the frequent crises faced by the Assad regime since 2011.

Campist anti-imperialism weakens internationalist politics by essentializing certain struggles and erasing victims in the region, ironically reinforcing the discourse that seeks to erase the Palestinian cause by claiming it to be an extension of Iranian geopolitics. The perspectives on Syria and Ukraine, alongside those on Palestine and Lebanon, underscore the contradictions of the pseudo anti-imperialism of the Global North left and emphasize the need for transnational solidarity among oppressed peoples in the Global South. This understanding highlights that supporting the Palestinian cause does not require backing authoritarian governments; rather, it necessitates confronting both internal and external oppressions. In doing so, we reaffirm our commitment to self-organization and solidarity against the war-mongering policies of states, upholding our anarchist principles of anti-authoritarianism, consistent anti-imperialism, solidarity with the oppressed, and critical engagement with all forms of power and domination.

As anarchists, we fundamentally oppose all forms of coercive authority and centralized power, advocating for self-management, mutual aid, and voluntary cooperation instead. When Western leftists support authoritarian regimes, they often compromise on this essential principle. These regimes embody the antithesis of anarchism by centralizing power, suppressing dissent, and curtailing freedoms. Supporting such states contradicts the anarchist commitment to dismantling oppression and authority. As anarchists, we oppose imperialism in all its forms, advocating for the self-determination of all peoples. A nuanced, consistent anti-imperialist stance should not equate to supporting any state that opposes U.S. hegemony. Authoritarian regimes often engage in their own forms of imperialist or oppressive behavior both within and outside their borders. By supporting such states under

the guise of anti-imperialism, leftists can inadvertently endorse alternate forms of imperialism and oppression.

As anarchists, we emphasize solidarity with the oppressed and strive towards liberating the most marginalized. Authoritarian states have records of human rights abuses including the persecution of minorities, political repression, and curtailing of freedoms. Western leftist support for these regimes often overlooks or minimizes the suffering of these oppressed groups, thus betraying the principle of international solidarity with all oppressed peoples. As anarchists, we critically analyze and challenge all forms of power and domination. By uncritically supporting authoritarian states due to their opposition to the West, some leftists fail to critically engage with the nature of power and governance in these countries. Such support can become an endorsement of one form of domination over another, rather than a true challenge to all power structures.

As anarchists, we demand consistency in ethical positions against all forms of exploitation and abuse. Supporting authoritarian regimes requires a selective ethical stance, where some human rights violations are ignored due to political convenience. This inconsistency undermines the ethical foundations of leftist and anarchist ideologies, which aspire to universal principles of justice and equity. We call for transnational solidarity among all oppressed peoples, disregarding the geopolitical power plays that have shaped the present circumstances.