

Paving the Way for the Enemy's Victory, With Our Own Flesh and Blood

The missed lesson of Syria and Libya's Arab Spring, and what it means for our struggle in the so-called united states.

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In the early 2010s, the Arab Spring spread across the Arab world. In Tunisia and Egypt, at a surface level analysis, an alliance between pro- democracy protest movements and street fighting hardened soccer Ultras enabled a series of strong riots across urban centers, showing strong resolve in the face of police and military repression, resulting in the fall of both governments. We would assert that these rapid victories were also partially thanks to the weakness of those governments: in both cases, protests focused around a weak dictator, who quickly fled out of fear for his life and wealth.

Libya and Syria soon followed – but the governments there showed more resolve. They would not go so easily.

Libya came first. The Libyan movement began with mass protests and rioting, as in Tunisia and Egypt. But as the fight went on, and as the situation in the country was destabilized, armed fighting groups began to emerge alongside protesters and rioters. These armed fighting groups frequently did not have the same goals as the majority of protesters. Indeed, among these groups was ISIS, along with many ISIS and AQ affiliates. There were moments where communities autonomously armed themselves, raiding local armories, but these communities and their influence were vastly limited in comparison to the growing armed movements spread throughout the country. Defecting soldiers and police threw their support to certain groups over others, giving those groups an edge in supplies and training.

Quickly, these armed groups came to dominate the struggle against the government. In many regions it was no longer safe to have a protest that did not align with these armed groups' views – they would crush it just like the government would. The moment of mass movement was over, and those who were not armed and organized were forced to watch and pray as insurgents and government forces fought – praying that whichever group came out on top would bring positive change.

Then came Syria. Much the same as in Libya, it began with protests and rioting. Strong coalitions of protesters with unified demands came out in the streets. But by the fourth month, armed groups had begun to form. As in Libya, these groups frequently did not share the motives of the

protesters, and as in Libya, these groups included IS and AQ affiliates. The mass movement was marginalized by these armed groups, and in liberated zones autonomous councils were intimidated and co-opted, sometimes literally at gunpoint.

The lesson is that armed groups will reap the most benefit from instability. It allows them to gain political power, prestige, and strength. Unarmed groups and protesters are sidelined for the ambitions of armed groups.

Neither Syria nor Libya had a strong gun culture leading up to these moments. The formation of armed groups in these countries came as the result of the protests, rather than a factor at play leading up to protests. Predicting the rise of these various armed groups, their ideologies, and which ones would achieve supremacy or become key players would have been difficult to do before their actual formation.

This is, of course, not the case in the United States. In the US, we have a well-established gun culture and well-established armed groups which we can already observe and make predictions about. The existence of these groups negates the potential for new armed groups to emerge from amongst protest movements.

The vast, overwhelming majority of armed civilian groups in the US are white and far-right. These groups are also the best equipped, because of the popularity of those views amongst wealthier demographics, the largest, because of the popularity of those views in general, and the best trained, because of the popularity of those views amongst ex-soldiers and the police.

If the lesson of Libya and Syria holds true, these are the groups that will reap the most benefit from the instability created by protests and riots. Part of this is negated because these groups are primarily rural, while protests and riots are primarily urban. In 2020, this resulted in far-right militias deployed in cities behaving cautiously on unfamiliar ground, in some cases (in practice) fully yielding power to those in the streets. In Libya and Syria, armed groups gained the most influence after police forces were driven out of entire cities, something that did not take place in 2020. In cases in 2020 where police were driven out of neighborhoods or city blocks, it appears that right-wing militias were rarely positioned to exploit those situations, and sometimes there was enough armed presence to deter them – usually just two or three people with rifles amidst a crowd, often autonomously-acting black community members.

But if we achieve what so many anarchists are working towards and praying for – simply put, “2020, but bigger” – and, with that, greater victories over the police and the state, the situation will be ripe for far-right militias to exploit it. Two or three rifles will not be enough to deter them at that time.

We are, or should be, familiar with the views of these militias. They are white supremacist, Nazi, and settler movements. A section of them militantly opposes Trump because they believe he won't go far enough. They have a wide base of support, and because they are the largest and best organized armed groups short of the state's, without an armed movement to counter them, instability will favor their rise to power. Interviews with militia leaders and members in 2020 demonstrate that they are well aware of this. The ‘boogaloo’ concept, which was brought to national attention in 2020 but persists quietly in armed right-wing circles, also demonstrates this – the entire concept is about creating or exploiting massive unrest, and many underground right-wing groups are organized entirely around this framework.

Not to mention the nature of their only real existing counter, the organized armed left, today – small, primarily white, with strong Marxist tendencies and much of the same problems that permeate every Marxist space. They are poorly trained compared to the fascists they intend to

counter, because they focus only on firearm and first aid training. Meanwhile, right-wing militias understand and can readily apply military techniques like fire and maneuver in addition to fundamental firearm and first aid skills. In other words, the armed left trains like it only expects self-defense situations, while the armed right trains like it intends to fight and win: a political force intent on achieving its political objectives. The late Black liberation soldier and prisoner of war Maroon Shoatz said, “Our Black organizations should have known, right from the beginning, that they had to build a military component capable of defending our people from the attacks they were undergoing as a result of working to free themselves from oppression. Sadly, this was not the case.”¹ All anarchists should heed this lesson.

We should also remember the context within which we are struggling. America is a settler state, and 85% of the population is made up of settlers - from various backgrounds, but primarily (71%) white. At pivotal intersections of history settlers will, on the whole, uniformly defend settlerism.² When settlers claim progressive politics, they tend to actually pursue a politics of settler privilege. In practice, settler leftist class-reductionists, guns or no guns, have more in common with the radical tradition of the white miner uprisings in apartheid South Africa or the Israeli kibbutzim than with Turtle Island’s rich history of slave uprisings and Native resistance. White race-traitors are real but rare, and settlers willing to betray their settler status are even fewer. The struggle in America will be primarily black and indigenous, or it will not be a liberatory struggle.

Improving the existing organized armed left is not something we desire. Instead, we advocate for the creation of autonomous, anarchist fighting cells. Believe it or not, this is a common framework for right-wing armed groups – just as many armed right-wingers are in small, 5 or 10 man groups as are in large, hundred- or thousand- member groups. Of course, even their small groups are inundated with unnecessary hierarchy, which is not a shortcoming we have to subject ourselves to. This small group model, with good organization and training, and especially in conjunction with other autonomous cells operating in the same theater of operations, can be an extremely effective fighting force, and was used to great effect to defeat the US in Afghanistan.

The initial armed response to the Nazi rally in Lincoln Heights – autonomous and spontaneous – is a compelling starting point for what we want to foster with intentionality and vigor going forward.

Where to start? We believe an autonomous fighting cell should strive to have at least the following:

1. Firearm familiarity and marksmanship skills.
2. A grasp of asymmetric strategy (e.g. protracted people’s war, ‘defeat in detail’) – in other words, they should have the answer to the question, “how do we win in the big picture?”³
3. An intimate familiarity with small unit tactics (e.g. fire and maneuver, breaking contact, movement to contact) – in other words, they should have the answers to the question, “how do we win on the small scale – in individual engagements?”⁴
4. A familiarity with ‘soldiering skills’ (e.g. individual movement techniques, range estimation, signature reduction, cover and concealment).⁵

¹ A series of zines on this is in the works. The Ranger Handbook is a resource, but in our opinion too dense to be all that useful when taken as an introductory work.

² The Finnish Soldier’s Guide (2024) is a superb foundational resource on this, available free online.

³ From the essay *Black Fighting Formations*.

⁴ Read *Settlers*, by J. Sakai.

⁵ We may write a zine on this in the future.

5. Serious first aid skills.
6. Bushcraft and foraging skills.
7. A familiarity with OpSec (operational security) and security culture.
8. Discipline, in the sense of self-drive and perseverance.
9. Consistency in training.

Seasoned anarchists actually have an edge in the urban environment as an armed force because of their familiarity with unarmed 'street fighting' – for our purposes, a term encompassing every tool and skill employed during a demonstration that clashes with police, including but not limited to barricades, bloc and de-bloc, street medics, affinity groups, and the employment of a wide array of projectiles. In the West Bank, a youth familiar with street fighting compliment armed resistance fighters. Together, they dominate the streets, man the barricades, and make entering their cities a nightmare for the IDF. The resistance fighters of the West Bank were once themselves the youth throwing stones and setting tires alight, before graduating to armed struggle.

But we have to start somewhere. Getting armed and becoming familiar with operating your gun is the first step. Encourage your friends to get armed. Encourage your community. Being armed should be the norm for anarchists, and for all members of marginalized communities – as normal as it is for right-wingers. This is another advantage the right currently has over us: even those of them who are armed but not organized can quickly find others who share their views and are armed. Even without any of the right's other advantages over us, if all of their militias collapsed tomorrow and dispersed like dust in the wind, this alone would give them a decisive edge.

In the West Bank model, only a sparse few are armed. This is not because the youth choose not to be, and prefer to throw stones against armored cars and settler raids, but because getting armed there is exceedingly difficult. Men in Jenin will sell their belongings and their sole means of income to get a single smuggled rifle with rusty parts and limited, corroded ammunition in order to face their oppressors. We are not faced with this difficulty: here, we can purchase a rifle with half a month's pay and a short trip to the store. There is no excuse, then, for our condition, where we are happy to allow our enemies to be stronger than us. Despite the inaccessibility of weapons there, the West Bank model is strong. So imagine what we could create.

The lesson of Libya and Syria, applied to our context, is that when the big uprising comes, and we make great victories over the state, it will facilitate our already armed and organized enemies' rise to power - unless we are also armed and organized, to exploit our own successes and counter and defeat our enemies. Defeat is not an option; nor is ignoring the problem and hoping it goes away. Now is the time to prepare.

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