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Another week, another misogynist and/or white nationalist terrorist attack. They're urging each other on, they're forming broad movements, ecosystems, networks of cells. The Base. Atomwaffen. The Rise Above Movement. American Identity Movement. Hammerskin Nation. Wolves of Vinland. European Kindred. Proud Boys. The names and factions proliferate. Hordes congregate online to cheer the latest atrocity and urge further. One is left unsure if the shootings will speed up in their regularity or if they are moving towards some dramatic escalation. Perhaps they will shoot up a nursery. Spread gas in a major city. Finally make good on their "Right Wing Death Squad" promises and try to march door-to-door exterminating enemies. There is a sense that almost the entire political spectrum — minus antifa — has decided to sit back and wait for the spectacle.

I've been thinking a lot about why the coalition that opposed the Bush Administration fractured so badly in the face of resurgent fascists. There's a lot of reasons — the whole paleocon saga for

instance. But I think it's under-examined how much of it comes down to two very different perspectives on insurgency.

Way back in the immediate aftermath of September 11th — as leftists, liberals, and libertarians came to terms with the radical expansion of state power and huddled together for warmth — it was common to hear two very different critiques of the War On Terror:

The first critique was that islamist insurgency isn't a real threat.

The second critique was that such insurgency was so potent against states that the US *couldn't* win against it.

It was somehow never apparent at the time how *contradictory* these two positions are.

In the first perspective Al-Qaeda was a criminal organization that could and should be arrested and prosecuted in the context of existing criminal enforcement. In the latter perspective Al-Qaeda was the Viet Cong, destined to win against the empire, and the sooner the US retreated the less costly the whole thing would be.

Broadly speaking, liberals took the first perspective, anarchists the latter. Libertarians and leftists split between the two camps.

This was a split over the recognition of asymmetric conflict. Liberals thought the state could handle anything, whereas anarchists have faith that decentralized insurgent modes of resistance are highly effective.

This is an underemphasized reason why anarchists take fascist organizing so seriously — we believe in the power of radical activism and insurgency (although we reject specific forms of terrorism). If you believe that these decentralized or bottom-up means of organizing can accomplish anything and even out-punch the US empire, then fascists utilizing the same strategies logically constitute a bigger threat than the US empire.

From this perspective, as bad as the War On Terror was, as bad as the neoconservative or neoliberal authoritarians were, insurgent fascists are worse.

But to those liberals who *don't* believe in asymmetric conflict and insurgent resistance, who spent decades arguing that terror-

For this alone, antifascist activists deserve our attention and sympathy. And it is probably for this sin alone that the Ted Cruzes of the world will come for them.

Just as white nationalist terrorism can never be solved by the state, there is no greater threat to the state than people solving the problem on their own. This is, at the end of the day, the cardinal sin, conservatives most obsess over. Protesters directed traffic? Protesters fought off nationalist gangs? The state's monopoly on violence — *and legitimacy* — is being eroded. A new world is being built in the shell of the old.

The "War On Terrorism" was always a war OF terrorism. A mutual symbiosis. The empire bombed and the islamists bombed in response. A quagmire of terrorist establishment against terrorist insurgency. Indeed it's worth noting that ISIS only collapsed through the volunteerism and sacrifice of anti-authoritarian insurgents. It took non-terrorist insurgents to stop the terrorist insurgents. And of course even with ISIS in retreat there is no even remote suggestion of decommissioning the US's imperial apparatus. The idea is laughable.

In contrast, the decentralized, bottom-up, and volunteer nature of antifascist activism means that — unlike the police state — it has consistently died down when the monsters go home.

It frustrates me that so many liberals compulsively reject any and all hint that terrorism could constitute a real threat. They do so for the same ideological reasons that conservatives compulsively reject any hint that global warming is real. They fear an implicit second step: If a given threat is real then surely the answer must be expanded state power. And so they cannot and will not concede that the threat is real.

But terrorism is a real threat. And not only are there options other than the state, the state is the worst option.

We do not need to fight grassroots terrorism with a more bureaucratic and inflexible terrorist apparatus like the state. We can and should instead turn to bottom-up volunteer resistance.

And this is the place where antifascism presents probably the most serious challenge ever leveled to the post-Patriot Act police state. It implicitly challenges whether we *need* a state apparatus to protect us, much less a grotesquely far-reaching surveillance state. If residents of a neighborhood can come together to resist white nationalist gangs, to do their own investigative reporting and to organically provide one another security and solidarity — it evaporates the state's legitimacy.

ism wasn't a *real* threat — the logic is reversed. Misogynist and white nationalist terrorists must be framed as marginal distractions. Deplorable, but not existential dangers.

Indeed this liberal perspective continues to fear state repression more than it does paramilitary terrorism, instinctively drawing a deep difference between the two. Thus anarchist resistance to neonazi activity is first and foremost framed in terms of liberal fears about "giving the state a license to oppress."

Whereas to anarchists the US empire — while still evil — is almost a peripheral concern in comparison to the potential danger of reactionary insurgents. Hence anarchists going to Syria to fight ISIL and anarchists fighting fascist street gangs. These conflicts are much more *insurgent versus insurgent* than they are the *institution versus insurgent* of the US War On Terror.

Anarchists by virtue of our politics have to believe deeply in the potency of decentralized insurgent means. We believe that a tiny minority can reshape the world, can inflict such costs through resistance as to make some injustices untenable. We recognize that certain social and technological contexts create asymmetric relations to conflict — empowering attackers over defenders. Whether these be the decentralized seeding of torrents to bring down industries or the proliferation of guns to make state repression more costly. Sabotaging military trains and sneaking video cameras into slaughterhouses, these are bottom-up forms of resistance that impede, complicate, and derail systems of power. If we didn't believe in the potency of such insurgency, we would devolve into liberals like Noam Chomsky, who see no real path to eroding or collapsing the leviathan, instead advocating statist reforms and electoral participation.

But at the same time that anarchists embrace some forms of insurgency, we reject terrorism in both the sense of attacks on non-combatants and the exploitation of irrational terror to control. Reasonable people can disagree on whether a propagandist for the Proud Boys, who joins them in premeditated attacks on their po-

litical adversaries and doxes their victims, constitutes a *combatant* as such, but some random person just getting food at a garlic festival clearly does not. Disincentivizing racist organizing by naming, shaming, and boycotting the participants is the purest example of the market at work — rational choices and responses every step of the way. The shooter who opens fire into a crowd at a mall is intentionally exploiting something far more primal and irrational, or in equivalent words, *reactionary.*

While anarchists believe strongly in bottom-up resistance, and infamously that has historically involved acts like direct assassination of oppressors, *terrorism,* properly defined, is not in our wheelhouse. It cannot be.

Resistance impedes and complicates, terrorism simplifies. Terrorism is the primordial goo of the state, a violence that encourages us to surrender critical thought, to retreat to reassuringly simplistic hierarchies, immediate notions of rules and order. The state is the apex expression of weaponized terror, keeping entire populations in check through PTSD.

It only takes a little bit of blood to water the roots of sweeping authoritarianism. The police do not need to murder *every* black person to create conditions where few individuals fear poking their heads out too far. A little bloodshed, a little slaughter around the margins, can keep an entire population under the boot of the state.

Those who make the inevitable snide comparisons of *numbers* between terrorism and heart disease fail to grasp that what happens at the margins can dramatically shape the rest of society.

When neonazi gang members controlled the streets of Portland in the 80s and 90s (documented by a journalist in detail in *A Hundred Little Hitlers* after a high profile murder by East Side White Pride) this had a stark impact upon the everyday lives of minorities and activists. When everyone alters their behavior to avoid being targeted by police or white nationalists, explicit acts of repression need only fall on the few who stand out to keep the rest in line.

I believe that many conservatives — hyped up on the narratives and disinformation spread from literal fascists to the conservative media ecosystem in the Trump era — sincerely see antifascism in terms of terrorism. Every fascist thug with prison nazi tattoos is but an innocent MAGA grandpa terrorized by SJW college kids out to suppress all slightly different perspectives. They hungrily embraced that inaccurate victim narrative when they were first introduced to antifascism by credulous and opportunistic conservative pundits in 2017, and now it has been too many years, they are too wedded to it, to ever give in the face of any amount of evidence.

The truth is of course that antifa was for decades derided by both authoritarian communists and the younger social justice generation as being too soft, too pragmatic, too starkly limited. I remember a friend talking my ear off to complain about antifascists refusing to beat up some racist she'd met in a bar. The antifascists in turn rolled their eyes about it when I brought it to them, "*we stop fascists from organizing and doing harm, that's a hard enough task without trying to pick fights with every racist grandpa, there are millions of them, there'd be no end to it. We've got prison nazis trying to kill us; there are bigger fish to fry.*" My friend was scandalized by how "problematic" this dismissal was.

But I've long admired this response. The anarchist toolbox lends itself well to disruption, impedance, not to the creation of some new regime, enforced by terror. When the fascists form orgs, bust them up. When they try to organize anonymously, expose them. When they try to terrorize the streets, fight them off. Escalating rarely, judiciously, and never even remotely to their levels. And when they retreat to some variation of normalcy, let them.

Just as we wouldn't blink about someone throwing fake blood on a military recruiter table, we shouldn't blink when folks throw milkshakes at fascist recruitment rallies. These are clearly the same thing. Whether the Marines, ISIS, or Atomwaffen, these are terrorist projects.