

Towards a New, Anarchist Gun Culture

A story of three armed traditions.

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Training at the range together twice a month, constantly buying new gear, hundreds of rounds of ammo, and quirky morale patches. Sometimes running security for drag shows or pride events, all the while policing all those present: don't escalate the situation, don't behave autonomously or spontaneously, don't throw bricks at those fascists, don't even call them names or goad them on – the logic being, presumably, that with guns present, any escalation could be extreme, with fatal consequences. This is the state of the armed left in the occupied territory we currently call 'the united states.' Since 2020, countless protesters, demonstrators and event attendees across the country have reported being policed while under the unwitting 'protection' of various armed leftist groups. In conjunction with this issue, another major problem becomes clear: somehow, paradoxically, the possession and presence of guns, which in theory would massively increase the capability of a radical force, results in far *less* action than was happening before the possession and presence of guns, to such an extent that armed leftists actively suppress the action and spontaneity of others. Part of this is just an extension of how leftists, and especially leftists affiliated with orgs, already operate within movements. But there is more to it than that.

What we could call the 'mainstream' armed left in the united states, in practice, follows a very specific model that it has shamelessly inherited from the armed american right. Key to this model is sitting around waiting, waiting for 'shit to hit the fan' (or SHTF, as they like to call it), spending their time training and buying shit under the guise of 'increasing their capabilities,' so that when 'the time comes,' they'll be ready. As the author of *An Anarchist Anti-Gun Manifesto* puts it, "Still, they are convinced of their own radicality because they armed themselves, they have primed themselves to defend the marginalized (potentially including themselves), the most radical thing one can do." The author continues, "**But the genocide isn't coming, it's here.**"

This is the crux of the issue. As the armed left assumes a defensive posture, and only ever has conflict with fascist 'civilians,' but never with the state, the war that is the modern world continues to be waged and blood continues to be spilled. Only the unarmed seem to be actually in the street smashing shit and throwing shit at cops. This is part of why the author of *An Anarchist Anti-Gun Manifesto* begins their zine how they chose to: "Before I begin in earnest, let me be clear: this is not a call for pacifism. This is not some plea for nonviolence in the face of the near incomprehensible brutality of the police, the prisons, of the state and its vigilante accomplices. **If anything, this text is intended as a call for more explicit attack on our enemies, more**

direct antagonism against the institutions of our suffering, a more intentional incorporation of resistance to these brutalities into our daily lives until such resistance is as second nature as breathing.” Indeed, from our experience from 2020 till now it would seem that guns are actually antithetical to radical action.

But this is actually only a symptom of the model, culture, and nature of the armed american left: a primarily white, settler, communist (and therefore eurocentric), and class-essentialist movement which fears action and loves organizing for the sake of organizing, waiting for ‘something to happen’, and ignoring when things do happen. Indeed, the only time white people really ever shoot at cops in america is when they get caught beating their partners. On the whole, the white left has no desperation, and fights for settler privilege thinly veiled in radical language¹, something they are reluctant to take real risks or make real sacrifices for. It is one of the most cowardly, functionally useless armed radical traditions in the world, reminiscent of the armed settlers in israel who ‘opposed’ their country’s genocide with sit-ins and art displays while their guns collected dust at home. **This is not the only way.**

Other armed traditions exist. Other movements exist around the world where the presence of guns actually does translate into increased capability and more fierce, radical attacks on our enemies. The most interesting and insightful case study is the West Bank, but first we will look at an example closer to home.

As we said earlier, the only time white people in america really ever shoot at cops is when they get caught beating their partners. Seriously. Yet 313 cops have been shot and killed in the united states since 2020, averaging five a month. So who is actually putting in work, carrying out armed struggle, resisting our oppressors and putting them in the grave? Not leftists, not anarchists, but black youth struggling to survive. Black teenagers and young adults being stopped and frisked while trying to complete a doordash order, or just trying to get home safely after a party at a friend’s house. In the same cities where white leftists go to the range every weekend in the name of ‘preparedness,’ where they hoard rifles and ammo and train in their plate carriers and ballistic vests, the black working class does what those white leftists would consider unthinkable, with so much less, and makes our enemies bleed.

This model embodies spontaneous and autonomous resistance. However, these acts of resistance are, by nature, sporadic and disconnected from sources of support. Imagine if we organized around the resistance already happening in our cities, in our communities, instead of forming more masturbatory orgs and groups that barely break out of our existing ‘radical’ bubbles and barely contribute to the struggle, if at all. We won’t prescribe what this should look like – any recommendations we do make will be at the end of this text – but one should get creative in their thinking. The regular killing of cops in our cities already demonstrates that what any of us have deemed impossible is possible, so don’t be afraid to push the limits – least of all in the safety of your own mind.

Also a part of this armed tradition is the use of guns in the Ferguson uprising, where two cops were shot in the midst of the riots (right in front of their own police station!), and across the country by black working class youth during 2020. In the 2014 zine *Cars, Guns, Autonomy*, co-author Bart recalls:

The St. Louis area has a history of police being shot at, and police are very aware of that. The police know people are armed and willing to shoot. From the beginning of the uprising, rebels made this very clear: one of the first things to happen after

they killed Mike Brown was shots being fired into the air. And then Sunday, the first night of rioting, during the looting, people were again firing shots. I can think of one particular situation where the police tried to push in, and people formed a line to fight them off. As the standoff was ending, the police cowardly gassed the crowd and left. Instantly there were gunshots at the police all up and down that mile stretch of road. You could hear gunshots everywhere, and see people jumping out of cars to shoot; shooting at them, shooting in their general direction. People learned that you didn't even need to shoot at them, but simply shooting in their general direction or making it known that you were armed was enough to keep the police back. So the guns kept them at bay. It was the first time in my life that I've ever seen that level of blatant armed action in a riot or demonstration or whatever you want to call what was going on up there.

This, too, proves that much more is possible than the 'armed left' pretends. Again – imagine what would be possible if we organized around the armed resistance that already exists in our cities!

The use of arms in Ferguson was not without its faults: friendly fire was all too common, as bullets directed at the cops caught fellow rioters in the crossfire. For some, this made the takeaway of the Ferguson uprising be a lesson against the use of guns. In our opinion, it demonstrates a gap in our learning – we need to understand how to employ firearms in riots and protests to the best effect, and share this knowledge amongst ourselves in literature and conversation so that this becomes common knowledge, as commonly known as how to make a t-shirt balaclava, at least within our most armed communities. If hitting each-other with bricks on accident was a frequent occurrence in an uprising, surely we wouldn't let the takeaway be that we should never throw shit at the cops again?

The third armed tradition we will look gives us some insight on what this (employing firearms in riots and protests to the best effect) might look like.

In the West Bank, whenever there is an IDF raid or an attempt to arrest a freedom fighter or protestor, all the youth come out to greet them. They have a well-developed model of street fighting and resistance, quickly deploying barricades of burning tires, quickly conglomerating at critical intersections and pelting military vehicles with stones and molotovs. As the youth's rapid response shapes the IDF incursion, the Palestinian fighters arrive – only recently youth themselves, who graduated to armed struggle, and therefore intimately familiar with all the tactics and methods of the unarmed youth. They work in harmony together: fighters assume positions at key vantage points, within the crowd, or behind key positions of cover, and support the youth with a constant stream of bullets against the IDF, while the youth rapidly build barricades and put an unpassable crowd between the IDF and those fighters they seek to kill or arrest. Despite how common this occurrence is, friendly fire incidents are unheard of, probably due to the rigorous training of the fighters and their intimacy with the methods of the protestors, having once been unarmed protestors themselves.

Already, this demonstrates an alternative to the experience of the author of *An Anarchist Anti-Gun Manifesto* and so many others in the united states: "I saw far too many [...] 'radical' policing forces in 2020 to ever trust a person who shows up to a riot carrying an AR." In the West Bank model, honed since the first intifada, armed fighters (by another name, people who show up to a riot carrying an AR) and unarmed youth work together in sync in a kind of uprising

ecosystem where both have a crucial niche to fill, a unique way to contribute to the clash. Rather than police unarmed demonstrators, the armed fighters use their unique capacities to enable and support them, and the unarmed demonstrators do the same in return. We will draw more conclusions later, but for now, suffice it to say that we cannot allow our limited experience in the united states blind us from what is really possible – with guns as much as anything else.

This model does not preclude the possibility for armed spontaneity – spontaneity has its place in the West Bank, where unaffiliated armed individuals or small groups will regularly go out at night and shoot at IDF checkpoints, will sneak into Israeli settlements or cities and attack IDF soldiers and guards, and surely some will take part in protests with their guns. Most people who are armed and active in the West Bank choose to join one of several armed groups operating in their cities to maximize their potential and capability, but not always. Spontaneity also arises in the interaction between these factions – in some parts of the West Bank, such as Jenin and Tulkarem, you will sometimes have six or more factions operating in a single city. Some factions are affiliated with parties, some are dissident offshoots, and others arise autonomously from amongst the people, such as the Lion’s Den or the Jenin Brigade. When any one faction initiates a clash with the state, or the member of any one faction is the target of an Israeli arrest raid, all the other factions rush to join the clash.

The story of the Jenin Brigade in particular is a story of spontaneous, autonomous armed action significant and insightful enough, both as it relates to the topic of this zine and to the overall struggle, to dedicate a section of this zine to. Taken from the *Resistance News Network* telegram channel, now banned in the United States but still accessible through mirrored channels:

An Arabic proverb says, “The first of rain is a drop.”

In recent years, the Jenin refugee camp has attracted significant attention due to the resurgence of armed conflict within it. This was a major reason for the spread of resistance to spread throughout the West Bank, after it had slowed for 15 years. Jenin, the Wasp’s Nest, was the capital of resistance in the second intifada. A third of martyrdom operations had come from Jenin alone. This storied history remained history until revived by the “renewer of the clash.”

This major shift in events can be traced back to one person, the founder of the Jenin Brigade, “the renewer of the clash.” Jamil Al-Amouri was the one to fire the first shot that poured into drizzle, rain, storms, and hurricanes, striking the occupation, purifying the land from their footsteps.

Born in 1996 in Jenin refugee camp, Jamil was a social, beloved person known for his leadership from a young age. He was the sole breadwinner for his family and worked as a driver. With the approval of his parents, he sold his car, the source of his livelihood, to buy his gun which he named “Nisan,” meaning April in Arabic, in reference to the 2002 Battle of Jenin.

Alone, his first operation took place in 2020 when he opened fire on the IOF [Israeli Occupation Forces] demolishing the home of the prisoner Ahmed Al-Qanba’a. He continued to carry out operations, firing at colonial checkpoints, resisting the incursions of the occupation of Jenin. His name was entwined with the Jalameh checkpoint; when Jenin’s residents heard the sound of gunfire near it, they would say, “This is, of course, Jamil al-Amouri.”

“Let Shin Bet know, the clash is coming,” chanted Jamil, his voice leading a protest in May 2021 during the Battle of Saif Al-Quds [the 2021 Israeli aggression]. One of the fighters in the Jenin Brigade said he participated in every demonstration in support of Gaza at that time, before firing at the Zionist checkpoints. It was during this battle that his family and friends urged him to organize a movement.

A year following his first operation, Jamil formed a cell of four fighters, which expanded to eight. This burgeoning cell continued to develop and is now known as the Jenin Brigade, the most formidable group in the West Bank.

The story of Jamil Al-Amouri and the Jenin Brigade contains countless lessons from which the Palestinian resistance continues to learn from, and is a story we should reflect on often as we take on the settler-colonial empire in Turtle Island and all its police forces, many of which, as we know, were trained by the IDF. And, pertinently, the inceptive struggle of the Jenin Brigade was the prison struggle: its existence was only announced in September of 2021, three months after Al-Amouri was martyred, when six Palestinian prisoners dug their way to freedom from an Israeli prison. As the Resistance News Network post continues, in the announcement of the group’s existence, “the fighters affirmed their readiness to defend these prisoners and to protect them by any means necessary in the Jenin camp.” In other words, the Jenin Brigade only revealed its existence as a distinct new force in order to defend escaped prisoners and to threaten those carceral, colonial forces which would seek to recapture them. That is *real* power through arms. Why is it that we treat action like this as if it is unthinkable within our own circumstances?

A crucial point this story illustrates is the inaccessibility of guns in the West Bank. As referenced in our previous writings, to get armed in the West Bank and other parts of the world often means selling everything you have to just to buy rusty old guns smuggled in piece by piece across the border or through checkpoints, and for which ammo is hard to come by. In our research we have even observed the use of a homemade slamfire pipe-gun by at least one West Bank fighter. If guns were as accessible in the West Bank as they are in the United States or the rest of Israel, we can imagine that armed spontaneity would be much more common there, and we can further imagine that it would be just as successful and impactful as the armed action taken by existing factions, as all fighters in the West Bank are forged as youth in the same streets and learn many of the same fundamental lessons there before graduating to armed struggle.

This concept of graduating to armed struggle – of participating in the riots and protests for months or years before being ready to take up the gun – is a fundamental aspect of the struggle in the West Bank, but is enforced by no one, arising simply from a common understanding and the natural flow of things. Perhaps if we commonly understood and implemented this model in the United States, we might improve how armed are implemented in our own struggle. Perhaps this also explains why friendly fire appeared to be far less common in 2020 than in 2014 in Ferguson – although, of course, armed action was evidently less common overall in 2020 than in the Ferguson uprising, which played a large part as well. Perhaps as we gain experience in the proving ground of protests, demonstrations and riots, as we understand the flow of clashes and how our local community, the people we struggle shoulder to shoulder with, fights in the streets, we become more equipped to approach armed struggle within the same context.

Of course, riots and protests are by far not the only environment where guns can be used, but we begin our conclusions with this point because the frequency of friendly fire in the Ferguson uprising is noteworthy enough to deserve immediate addressal, and the connection between the

use of firearms in the midst of Ferguson's street clashes and the use of firearms in the West Bank's street clashes gives us a good foundation for learning and addressing our own problems.

Other conclusions we draw from our study of these two armed traditions is that arms are *not* intrinsically antithetical to action. Rather, as many other anarchists have deduced and many other zines have shared, it is the american left that is antithetical to action.

This is where we draw a very important conclusion, and the impetus for this zine: We cannot afford for anarchists to submit to the model of the armed left. Anarchists who have already submitted to that model and have had its counter-insurgent mindset around firearms ingrained into them should escape and reject it as soon as possible. That model – which, it bears repeating, was shamelessly inherited from the right – is a counter-insurgent model, as is the case with most models of leftist organizing. No action will derive from it except by accident, as it is designed, consciously or unconsciously, to smother action. You might recall that our martyr Willem van Spronsen, at one time a participant of this leftist model who desired more than it would allow him, included in his final letter an acknowledgment that his friends at Redneck Revolt would not support his actions: "I have disaffiliated from any organizations who disagree with my choice of tactics."

You can argue that this was only to try and get them off the hook, but where was Redneck Revolt in the aftermath? Where were their guns? Armed leftists assure themselves and each-other that they are waiting for the shit to hit the fan, or for someone to spark something. Here was a spark, one of so many that could not ignite the armed left. Because the armed left was never gunpowder, it was wet cardboard.

So we reiterate: We cannot afford for anarchists to submit to the model of the armed left.

Rather, we have to build a new, anarchist armed tradition. In our opinion, it must be one that supports and organizes around the spontaneous armed resistance already happening in our cities, but also one that takes its own initiative, strikes the enemy in new ways, demonstrates new possibilities, and uncompromisingly translates armed capacity into armed action.

While autonomous armed community defense, like the initial armed response to the Nazi rally at Lincoln Heights, and more organized community defense, like the *Lincoln Heights Safety and Watch* which was born from that incident, are inspiring and necessary, it is critical that we take arms beyond self-defense. In the self-defense role, arms become a stagnant thing, potent but never to be fired except *if*. This is fine for the context of community defense, but it cannot be the extent of our capabilities in the context of genocide, imperial domination, slavery, the expansion of prisons and policing, and mass kidnapping.

We often forget that while defense protects us against the enemy's capabilities, attack quantitatively *reduces* his capabilities. They go hand in hand. We must develop the armed attack. Any blockage which prevents us from this – mental, practical, or otherwise – we must be dedicated to overcoming.

In our previous zine, *Paving the Way for the Enemy's Victory*, we promoted the creation of a loose network of small autonomous armed cells, the likes of which defeated the united states in Afghanistan and continue to threaten its soldiers in Iraq. This model is the most formidable match to our enemy's style of fighting, one which he has been unable to successfully adapt for decades since he first encountered it in southern Vietnam, and not for lack of trying. Small cells of as little to four to as many as fourteen or twenty can operate independently for light, rapid attacks, and in any given area as many cells as needed can come together for special circumstances, such as to attack a key objective or to defend against massacres. This is precisely how they defeated the

united states in Afghanistan, and, interestingly, a western military analyst applying an anthropological understanding to this model discovered that it strongly resembled how hunter-gatherer bands across the world tend to operate, hunting and gathering independently of one another but coming together for special circumstances such as a prominent harvest or mast year², whereas, to his findings, western militaries operated more like small states.

From our perspective, anarchist and flirting with anti-civ, we are more than happy to embrace an armed model which resembles hunter-gatherers and destroys militaries which both defend and resemble states.

In that zine, we laid out nine points which such an autonomous cell should strive for, at the least:

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. 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. A familiarity with 'soldiering skills' (e.g. individual movement techniques, range estimation, signature reduction, cover and concealment).
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.

As we said in that zine, we plan to write a zine in the future covering the second point. A series of zines is in the works on the third point, but we honestly doubt many distros will be interested in distributing them. In the meanwhile, you can also refer to the Ranger's Handbook and, if you are willing to explore it, there is a plethora of videos on youtube, of varying quality, relating to small unit tactics & fire and maneuver. Youtube, of course, is not a very secure place to be advertising an interest in these topics, so pursue that at your own risk. For its part, the Ranger's Handbook is pretty dense and inaccessible when taken as an introductory resource, but in our opinion far more accessible than the united states military's other work on small unit tactics and battle drills, FM 3-21.8. Versions of both throughout the years are available for free online.³

As for the fourth point, the Finnish Soldier's Guide is a superb foundational resource on this, is extremely accessible, and is also available for free online. It also contains pointers on marksmanship. If you're not sure where to start, start here.

The skills comprised by these three points in particular, as well as the entire list when taken as a whole, amount to a modern armed *martial arts* in the most literal sense. Developing them is, in our estimate, indispensable for a people trying to overcome their oppressors.

But this is not a prescription, nor are these the only skills we can implement in armed struggle. Anarchists should be unafraid to experiment, push the bounds, explore what-if's, and expand the struggle wherever possible by whatever means are possible. We should be ready to learn and adapt to the circumstances we are in and the circumstances that will unfold as a result of our resistance. What makes us anarchist, what drives us to anarchism, and what we get out of being

anarchist – the autonomy, the spontaneity, the personal responsibility – should be what drive the creation of a new anarchist gun culture.

The task is urgent because the struggle is urgent. The risk of not trying is far greater than the risk of trying. We leave you with these familiar words:

Hurry comrade, shoot the policeman, the judge, the boss. Now, before a new police prevent you.

Hurry to say No, before the new repression convinces you that saying no is pointless, mad, and that you should accept the hospitality of the mental asylum.

Hurry to attack capital before a new ideology makes it sacred to you.

Hurry to refuse work before some new sophist tells you yet again that ‘work makes you free’.

Hurry to play. Hurry to arm yourself.

(Alfredo M. Bonanno, *Armed Joy*)

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1. Read *Settlers*, by J. Sakai. Freely available online at readsettlers.org and elsewhere.
2. A year where all of one type of tree in a given area produce fruit. For example, every 2 to 5 years oak trees in a given area will collectively put out millions of acorns, while in the intermediate years very few acorns will be produced. This of course isn't relevant to the topic of the zine as a whole, but we decided it's too neat for anyone unaware to miss out on.
3. You would think that it would be best practice to read the most recent versions you can get your hands on, but we have found this to not be the case. Versions from the 90's onward contain roughly the same fundamental information. At best, more recent versions change small things like terminology, but the newest versions are sometimes missing entire sections, particularly in the case of FM 3-21.8 (now ATP 3-21.8), which no longer include battle drills at all – these have been moved to another resource, stripping it of a huge part of its usefulness.

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