

Defeat Fascists with This One Weird Trick

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I've been seeing a lot of rhetoric telling marginalized people in increasingly fascist countries that, if possible, they need to get a gun and arm themselves, and to learn how to shoot it. I also see a lot of people living comfortably in safe countries, telling people subject to violence or threat not to do so. I have a lot of mixed feelings about this discourse, and I bet you do, too.

In true clickbait form, before I tell you *this one weird trick*, let's lay a couple things out.

For reference, I know how to shoot a gun. The first time I shot a gun I was four years old and I owned my first gun at the age of six, just like my great-grandfather. I had a BB gun before that, but BB guns don't count to gun people.

Some of my earliest memories are climbing into a secret room accessed under the carpet in the closet in my estranged grandparent's old house. There was essentially an arsenal down there. That was my grandfather's arsenal. My estranged father had, and still has, his own arsenal. My aunt had hers. A lot of people had them. I was bestowed enough guns over the years of my childhood for my own *tiny* arsenal of about 20 guns, as I recall, though that was nothing compared to the people I knew.

I was taught by my conservative family and everyone I was surrounded by from a young age that we needed to keep guns in case the government ever comes for us or needs overthrown. Ironical, I know. And hunting, too, of course.

I don't own guns anymore.

That being said, this is not a condemnation of anyone who does own guns. It is a personal decision that needs no discussion here.

A man I know, Xhavit, was a weapons smuggler in Kosovo, his path took him walking through the forests of the Rugova Mountains. He bought weapons from Serbians in order to fight against Serbians. I asked him how that works. He said some people just want to make money. At the time he was smuggling, he was considered a terrorist by the US government before they rebranded him, and all those like him, a freedom fighter. He's pointed out to me some of the areas where he used to travel in order to obtain these weapons. Through the snow. On foot. Once, his brother almost succumbed to the cold when they got lost in a blizzard.

I think on Xhavit in that forest quite often lately.

I also think of the time that he got pulled off a bus and was almost executed by members of the regime he was fighting against until a Serbian guard recognized him and remembered drinking with him years beforehand at a dive bar and listening to rock and roll back in the day. The guard

had come over to the bar seeing if he could borrow a cup of sugar. Literally. But they connected, if only for that day. Xhavit was also a theatre kid with long hair. I've seen the pictures. He was adorable. Honestly, he still is, last I saw him. Not the type you would suspect to be a freedom fighter in those pictures.

The guard vouched for him, now years later, that Xhavit's a good guy and couldn't possibly be part of the resistance.

After the war, he wanted to go back to doing theatre, but they pressured him to stay to protect their *newborn* country. He struggled with this decision, but when he made it, he chopped off his long hair. He ended up becoming one of the highest ranking members of the Kosovo Security Force. He helped build it. He eventually became the Kosovo Defense Attaché to the US.

I'm not trying to romanticize militarism, I'm just laying out facts.

I once accidentally left a recording device (I'm also a filmmaker) in a room with the Kosovo President, who was also the former Prime Minister, was also former head of the Kosovo Liberation Army, and also probable mafia don. He's a scary guy. I inadvertently recorded a classified meeting— it was Xhavit who convinced all of them that I wasn't a spy. That was a relief. There's more to this story.

The phrase he used, "It's not like you're from Russia, or Serbia, you're from Iowa [which I was at the time]." We drank to that one later. On a couple occasions.

I was shocked that I eventually got my recorder back at the US ambassador's 4th of July party. No SD card, though. Of course.

I was a theatre kid. With long hair. Xhavit and I bonded over this.

I'm an anarchist, although, at the time, I didn't have a fully formed sense of my politics and wasn't yet introduced to the concept of anarchism. Kosovo is complex. People are complex. Xhavit is complex, as we all are.

My time in Kosovo was formative in my path to an anarchist perspective of the world.

When I think of Xhavit, I can think of the gun to his head, but then I remember that it was a cup of sugar, a human connection that saved him in this situation. Not a gun.

But I also can't discount that their paramilitary action brought about many of the inciting forces that led to their liberation. I don't want to minimize the complexities of this war. And I won't pretend that their current state of liberation doesn't come with many strings attached.

My point is about the idea that our first tool for self-defense absolutely must be human connection.

I'd say it doesn't work when you have a gun pointed to your head, but in Xhavit's case, it did, but the foundation for this was laid years in advance. We have to continue to build the worlds we wish to inhabit.

If Xhavit had a gun on him on that bus, it wouldn't have protected him because he would have been outmanned and outgunned. Moreover, it would have prevented the one guard from being able to vouch for him.

A gun didn't protect Alex Pretti, either. Let's be clear, though, he had every right to carry that gun without being shot. And he had every reason to seek to protect himself. But a gun isn't a shield, nor is it an excuse to shoot someone. He was murdered by fascists who have been directed to do so by a fascist regime bent on ethnic cleansing, genocide, and white supremacy.

Xhavit didn't know how to use a gun at that point, as I recall. I don't think he even knew how to use a tourniquet until *after* the war.

At that point in time, he was a *smuggler*.

That was his job.

Whatever fascist country you might be living in, are you thinking about getting a gun? I've had more than one friend ask me if they should get one. It's a fair question.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves a few more questions.

My first is, are you prepared to kill someone, even in self-defense? That's the only purpose of a gun.

Moreover, are you prepared to spend the time and money to study and practice? Do you think you can build up enough skill to feel both competent and safe with it?

Can you feel safe with it?

Do you think it would actually protect you in whatever situations you're planning on carrying it?

In the US, police have no obligation to protect you. It was decided by the supreme court. If, for example, you're marginalized and living far from community that could protect you and a police force out to get you, I can understand the impulse.

Could it potentially become more dangerous to have it than to not have it?

Are there other ways you could protect yourself and other skills that you could bring or other things you could spend your money on? Would a passport and planning an escape plan be better? Spending time building community?

Speaking of building community, even if you decide that a gun is the answer for self-defense, would it be better for you to get a gun, or would it be better to build community with people who are already better trained for this? People for whom this is *their* job. A neighborhood watch, for example.

On the other hand, maybe that is your skill already, but then, I'm not sure it's a question you're considering. You likely already know your answers.

In any case, I can't answer those questions for you.

Khavit's smuggled guns didn't ultimately win that war. US bombs that issued death indiscriminately ended that war. Even now, however, the situation is complex. Bombs don't actually solve things.

I don't think my estranged grandfather's arsenal would be enough to overthrow any government, either, if that's what you had in mind.

You already have other skills. You likely have other resources. What is your job in all of this? What are you capable of doing?

The anarchist perspective is often one that keeps in mind a diversity of tactics. Honestly, I am not really the guillotine-type of anarchist. I'm probably closer to the putting flowers in the end of someone else's gun barrel type. But I'm not you, and I can't make decisions for you.

You must make your own decisions about morality and practicality, but moreover about the worlds you wish to build in each moment, and the actions you take to achieve them, because the *actions themselves* are the embodiment of the worlds you build. There are no ends, only means.

And as for the thought of violence, what is violence? The state defines the destruction of property as violence, but doesn't define the murder of people by cops as violence. That's just policing.

Shooting someone is probably violence, but is it violence if it's in self-defense? What if it's to protect a kid? What if it's to protect a kid against an attacker who wears a badge during the day and a white hood in the evening?

Shooting someone is probably violence, but is watching someone shoot someone also violence when you could have intervened but chose not to?

These aren't simple questions and I'm not going to pretend to answer them for you, nor will I minimize the idea that people who are actively being harmed deserve protection, and that sometimes, when we're not doing enough to protect them, they deserve the ability to protect themselves.

We're watching in the US currently, as Democrats want us to be grateful to the governors in Minnesota and Maine, for example, when they send out the local police and National Guard to "protect" protestors. I genuinely think that they believe that this is what they're doing, but in practice, these agencies are protecting ICE and Border Patrol. They're quelling the protestors, with the intention that they don't want it to escalate or give a reason for the regime to make things worse.

Honey, they don't need another reason. There is no justification that these fascists need in order to accomplish their goals because no one is stopping them. And when you are stopping people from protest or intervention, you're choosing to be complicit. When people aren't allowed to protest, or to make change, what do you think will happen next? And in this case, if anyone has justification for escalation, will it be the fascists or the oppressed?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that riots are the language of the unheard. Although he also felt they were self-defeating. I'm not so sure of that.

So, what can we do?

I've spent a good deal of my career working in large scale international disasters and humanitarian crises. I've never once carried a gun, though myself and my former team have been the target of assassination and I've had to fear for my life on more than one occasion (although fear isn't quite the word, you get desensitized. PTSD is a hell of a drug.)— by the way, they didn't use a gun for the assassination attempt, either. They used an IED— a trip flare modified to take a grenade sitting next to an unexploded mortar shell. We were lucky they didn't set it up right and it didn't go off.

Off the coast of Libya, I watched from a few meters away as four guys jumped in each others' two fishing boats to pummel each other as they fought over an outboard motor that they were planning on selling to Libyan human smugglers. There were AK-47s in one of the boats. I watched with amusement and the vague notion that I was likely to get hit by a stray bullet if those went off, based on where I was standing on the bow of another boat. But how often do you get to watch an event like this? So, I stayed and watched. It was quite a show. I'm glad I stayed. But I also didn't catch a bullet. Maybe I would feel differently if I had. Or maybe I wouldn't think anything at all.

Nobody touched the guns. Ultimately, in the midst of the fighting, the motor was dropped in the ocean and they went to their respective boats and went on their ways.

These guys didn't even use the guns they had. Would have gotten them the engine in an instant. Fists were fine, but they chose not to use the guns. Honestly, I don't even think they considered the guns.

You know what is needed in crisis? Lots of people doing the work that they're able to do. People driving, people planning, people cooking, people taking care of the kids, people conducting search and rescue, people washing clothes, people giving medical aid. People selling beer and candy. People building themselves out of the disaster. People doing food and water distribution.

Probably even people *smuggling* in a lot of cases. Probably people who can help with an underground railroad in other cases.

Every crisis is different and has different needs, but every person is different and provides different skills.

But for those of you that wonder what skills you already have to offer and can't come up with a plan of action, let me offer you **this one weird trick** that can defeat fascists.

But in true clickbait form, let me remind you of something else first.

You remember that battles used to be fought in open fields with people shooting at each other. Then it was trenches. Then world-ending bombs.

Today they like to call much of the fighting of the later half of the 20th century through today *asymmetrical warfare*.

There's no doubt that any government will always have more material weaponry than the people it controls. This isn't new. From clubs to swords to guns to bombs.

The first thing is knowing that the government is not, and can never be by or for the people, because it is a method of control, and you are either free or you are not. So, they only gain their power through complicity. You have got to *stop* being complicit. I'll keep repeating it.

The US didn't leave Vietnam or Afghanistan because those countries had superior firepower. They left because it became too costly.

Funny thing about big expensive complex things. A factory can be shut down by a pair of wooden shoes or a wrench. Sabotage.

Want to know **this one weird trick**?

A box of nails can stop quite a few cars in literally any fascist country.

A box of nails doesn't necessarily protect you, although it could in pursuit, but is a gun to protect you? What's the purpose of the gun? An escape route might be more likely to protect you.

A box of nails doesn't really hurt anyone.

But damn, it really throws a wrench in those gears when a tire goes flat. It slows things down. It costs time. Time is money. Tires are money, too.

Because whether it's purchasing a gun, carrying a box of nails, or wasting fascist's time arguing about nonsense, you need to decide what the purpose is of what you're attempting to do.

Is a gun going to accomplish what you're trying to do as much as a box of nails?

Is it fit for purpose?

If I was living in a country like Iran, which is *rounding up people and killing them in the streets*, I might consider carrying a few nails in my purse before I considered carrying a gun. I might consider both, but I don't know. I'm not in Iran. But I'm also not saying that Iranian people shouldn't arm themselves, because that's a personal decision. Your protection and defense matter. Iranians are dying. Palestinians are dying. Ukrainians are dying. People are dying everywhere because their fascist governments are going to do what fascist governments do.

They kill.

And make no mistake, this didn't just begin happening in the US. This has been happening longer than you've been alive. It's just that it's now affecting white people and it's also where they can see it. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't be upset now, let alone that you shouldn't take action now, but you need to acknowledge that this is not new. And damn well listen when people of color speak on this.

Moreover, we can't go back to before. We can't accept a world that goes back to before the current regime, even if we could, which we can't. That bridge is burned. But Democrats want you to believe it's possible so that they can hold what shred of power and authority they believe they still have.

It's done. The old world is dead.

It's just that, I'm not sure that a gun can realistically cause as much resistance as a box of nails, so to speak. Especially in the hands of one person against a group, or against a government.

The Black Panthers carried guns for protection and self-defense. This fact was weaponized against them by the government, because as we all know, guns are for white people to protect themselves against the government, not people of color. But that's not even fully true, is it? Or else Alex Pretti might be alive right now. Then again, he was also defending people of color, without even using his gun.

Interesting that the murderer Kyle Rittenhouse is not only alive, but celebrated by the fascist regime. Meanwhile Alex Pretti is considered a domestic terrorist.

Xhavit was considered a terrorist, too, and then he was a freedom fighter. Once, a guy scolded me for being rude for not referring to him by his rank. I never told Xhavit that, but I think he would chuckle. I don't know, to me he's just Xhavit. He's that scared theatre kid with long hair on that bus who just can't handle the oppression he's surrounded by anymore, so he decided to *do something*. He's not a hero, he's not a villain, he's just a guy, trying to do what he can at that point.

This one weird trick isn't really about nails. Literally, just wasting their time without the need for nails does so much. What this is really about is the fact that there are so many unskilled and inexpensive ways to make *every inch have its cost*. Making it cost too much is one of the biggest ways to end the campaign.

And honestly, at least in the country where I live, it would be considered a crime to do something like that, so I wouldn't advise it.

I would limit my resistance to only legal methods, the kind of methods that the fascist regime says that I'm allowed to use against the violence that they dole out upon people every day. The kind that don't really get in the way of their agenda and that they can easily ignore, but really make you feel like you've done your part.

Then again, in the US, my existence as a trans person is essentially a crime, so if I'm already a criminal, what would I have to lose?

Something worth considering.

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