

Total Liberation – Zero War

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Introduction

This article has had to go through numerous revisions and rewrites in a desperate and often failing attempt to stay 'current'. Indeed one of the most difficult things we face in resisting Capital's bloody adventures (or bloody banalities if you prefer) is the global dimensions of this global war. By this I don't just mean physical space, but maybe less tangible elements that work to reinforce the tangible nature of our current oppression. For one the "war on terror" is working to reinforce and deepen a globalised temporal order. The global size of the planning and execution of the war (and its simultaneous transformation into news/entertainment/marketing) happens in a digital/artificial "Real Time"© . The speed of these endeavors is ever increasing, and the multitude on the whole is left to spectate on a bewildering display of men in suits, tanks and special effects. The ever increasing pace of the war (and for that matter the rest of the global order - can you make a distinction?) makes it difficult to think, conceptualize and act.

Beyond Anti-Americanism

... I awoke in a sweat from the American Dream

- Amebix

One of the first failings of the resistance against militarization is intellectual. There seems to be a sloppy anti-Americanism that abounds throughout anti-war sentiment in Australia. This anti-Americanism is attractive to many because it is something of an antidote to the cynical flag waving and rhetoric that parades across our screens. It is also credible since it identifies the litany of violent and abusive acts carried out by the US State. However, to identify the causes of global militarization as a product of a particularly nauseating element of US foreign policy (the idea that "the seppos¹ want to take over the world" or that "George W is a moron" - common sentiments in Australian society) is overly simplistic. Militarisation arises not from the US specifically but from a general crisis within the global empire of capital. Whilst the US does have a specific role in this world order as a major spoke in the composition and organization of military and economic forces, the current war is a product of the capital generally. Indeed if anything the "war on terror" - loose short-hand for multiple conflicts between numerous states and states in waiting - is a failing and destructive attempt by capitalism to resolve its unsolvable contradictions: it is an attempt to control an increasingly combative, self-organized and revolutionary multitude.

The Re-colonization of the Globe

And the history of this, their expropriation is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.

- Karl Marx

The individual motivations of Generals in Washington or Saudi Princelings are beyond the ken of lowly proles such as myself. The specific individual histories of individual conflict that

¹ Seppo is a WWII era piece of rhyming slang for Americans. Yanks = Septic Tanks = Seppos.

motivate the “war on terror” are beyond the scope of this article, however we can make some general observations about the role of war to the global ruling class.

The cyber-industrial civilization of capital is literally always at war. In fact, since the first development of class society violence has been a key component to the maintenance of order. Wars of extermination and colonization were fought to include more and more territories within the sphere of individual imperialist markets. Wars were fought between individual imperialist powers. As Zerzan identifies, the motivations of imperialist conflicts were often attempts to control the population at home.² Class society has never seen peace and is always in a constant state of conflict. The so-called “war on terror” may appear to be a sudden and sharp break with the past, but in reality it is an intensification of a process that has accompanied neo-liberalism as capitalist rackets around the globe have moved to direct violence to reinsure their power.

It is this later motivation for war that is increasingly important to the status quo. As Hardt and Negri write in *Empire* the entire globe has fallen under the domination of Capital, and a shifting multi-centered world order now administers it all. Thus war today is not between different, separate imperialist powers or to include territories within capitalism. Rather it is between factions within a unitary – if hybrid – empire that dominates the globe yet struggles to control the resistance from the multitude. Whilst in their respective propaganda Islamists and ‘Western’ politicians try to define each other as mortal enemies, they both have the same goal in mind: the continuation of the empire of capital.

War thus is increasingly used to re-colonize the globe – however not for one single nation-state but for capital generally. This is achieved through the application and extension of bio-power. “Bio-power is the form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it and rearticulating it. Power can achieve an effective command over the entire life of the population only when it becomes an integral, vital function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his³ or her own accord”. Bio-power is the way that control is created when life is subsumed by the logics and apparatus of capital. It is the way that the discipline of the system is found in the entire minutiae that constitute everyday life. It is used in numerous ways. Firstly there is no better way to enclose land and destroy subsistence non-market ways of life than war. Throughout the globe militarization is used to force people into proletarianization. Mass bombings, the torturing of civilians, the imprisoning of whole villages in camps, their transformation into refugees, even supposedly beneficial food aid, enforces the logic of capital – of being governed and controlled by agencies of the state and dependent on the global economy – into peoples’ everyday lives. Indeed in many parts of the world war is the only business in town and soldiering the only ‘profession’.

Subtle methods are often at work. The mapping of land by the military, the construction of military infrastructure is often the vanguard for the construction of the general apparatus of the global economy and the inclusion of previously peripheral populations into the matrix of cyber-industrial civilization. Indeed there is no better example of this than that of the Laguasa marsh in the Philippines (the site of a decades long Islamic insurgency which is now just a sphere of the “war on terror”), where the military napalmed the marsh into black soil thus literally clearing it of people and life and opening the way for its development into a tourist resort.

² Zerzan, J. “Origins and Meaning of WWI” in *Elements of Refusal*. Columbia Missouri, C.A.L. Press 1999 pp 145-165.

³ Hardt M. & Negri A. *Empire*. Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 2001 p23-24.

For populations already proletarianized, war is a crucial tool used to decompose their agencies of self-activity. A case in point would be that after and during the last Gulf War, the militant oil proletariat throughout the region (including in newly “liberated” Kuwait) suffered greatly through intensified state violence. War increased the naked violence of the state in peoples’ lives, whether it was through the carpet-bombing of Basra or the torturing and disappearance of Palestinians at the hands of US trained Kuwaiti secret police. The increased marginality people face in their lives from war, their increased insecurity, their displacement, works to break down the feelings of empowerment often necessary for people to launch assaults on capital. Intimidated by soldiers in the streets, planes in the air and the rule of martial law, disobedient populations can be cowed into acquiescence.

In what remains of the global “North” (as much as that has any meaning in these post-modern times of Empire) the use of war to increase the governmentality of the society of control is far more subtle. The recent experience in Australia suggests that the pretext of the war on terror is being used to legitimize and intensify state violence against dissidents. Even more all-encompassing is the use of the discourse of national security to intensify the repressive nature of all the networks of bio-political authority. Militarization is a society-encompassing spectacle that radiates and mutates out from TVs, radios, and conversations in the street. It takes on emotional, psychological forms that generate a sense of fear and hopelessness within the population about the very future of humanity. The real alienation and atomization that make up daily life in cyber-industrial civilization are telescoped to unbearable proportions. This spectacle of militarization makes individuals feel completely powerless and at the mercy of global political and economic forces. Faced with a seeming gulf of violence beyond comprehension, people begin to long intensely for the strong hand of the state to protect and guard them. Paranoia reaches fantastic heights as ethnic minorities become increasingly focused on as the “enemy within”. Coupled with this are feelings of sympathy for the armed wing of the state and its successes. A savage brutalization takes place where people in the malls and workplaces of Sydney begin to believe the security of themselves and their loved ones can only be guaranteed by the deaths of people in Iraq.

Bio-political control, however, is not the just the ideological hegemony of the system: it is not simply the dominance of ideas. Bio-political power arises when all of society is subsumed within the apparatus of capital: when life becomes dominated by the mega-technological world of work. Militarization is, if anything, an extension of all the techniques and technologies of control. The division of labor, specialization, the reduction of the individual into a cog in a machine, the reification of technological ability and the dominance of functional reason – isn’t all this expressed perfectly in the armed forces, in the military-industrial complex? And conversely is not the process of militarization the intensification of all of the above throughout all of society? The post-modern nature of the society of control is evidenced in the collapse of rigid subjectivities. The intensification of the “soldier” socially is the intensification of the “soldier” in all of us: our willingness to be trained, ordered, obedient and subjected to surveillance. Conversely, it is also our willingness to produce ourselves and others as soldiers: to order, to command and to subject those around us to surveillance.

Evidence of the above is the announcement that Australia Post now requires that you show photo ID if you are sending a package over 500 gm overseas. Here is an example of where the practice of surveillance and policing intensifies in seemingly innocent every-day situations. Thus mass society, made up of the lashing together of alienated and atomized individuals, becomes even more atrophied as everyone carries out the work of the state.

Military Forces of the Social Factory

Through the history of capitalism revolutionary resistance to war was based on the refusal to participate in the war machine. Soldiers would mutiny; others would resist conscription or refuse to sign up. Paralleling industrial action in the mass factory, it was the withdrawal of labor from the military factory. This undoubtedly reached a high point in the Vietnam War where the refusal to accept military labor inside and outside of the armed forces reached epidemic proportions. The desertion and mutiny by Iraqi soldiers did far more to end the last Gulf War than US smart bombs.

It is thus increasingly obvious that the use of mass soldiering with mass casualties creates political unrest both inside and outside the ranks. The days of mass soldiering were tied to those of the dominance of the nation-state. In contrast the process of globalization has seen with it the creation of global networks of organized violence that are coordinated through many points. At the center is always a hub of the covert, intelligence and special forces of the Global North and around them cheap proxy armies and mercenaries which the former often trains and coordinates. In the muddled world of international politics, these networks are often constructed with whatever is at hand and often appear quite illogical and contradictory. Also whilst capitalism is a global system having no home country, it is not homogeneous: splits and rifts at all levels of the ruling class are common and often violent. In fact the change in relationship between US forces and Islamist groups like Al-Qaeda is proof of this. Is this current conflict not in many ways an officers' rebellion within a single military force?

We have, however, still seen the deployment of large numbers of ground troops from the Global North. Though whilst their last deployment is a massive operation, and creates the feeling of total war, the soldiers themselves seemed to be put into very little real danger. Their purpose is spectacular, to create the feeling at home that there is a lot on the line. Thus the few soldiers that do die are transformed into heroes and martyrs whose deaths are given a weight and importance that in life the system never gave them. For us then in Australia (and I suspect the rest of the Global North) our refusal to fight is relatively meaningless as our labor is superfluous to the global war machine. We are unneeded, and thus new ways of struggle, more active insurgencies are needed to destabilize Capital.

Protest As Usual

So far the anti-war struggles in Australia have been confined mainly to street demonstrations of varying size. They have been largely organized by social democratic and Leninist groupings, though the political flavor of them is generally liberal: clergy, trade union leaders, and various do-gooders dominate the podium. Originally after the September 11 attacks these demos were a breath of fresh air. They worked to undermine the consensus that "everyone" supported the war, and combated the feelings of isolation felt by the dissenters. Street demos do and will have a place in struggle. They can draw people together and can have an important morale lifting effect. However this only works when the demos take place in the context of larger, more combative militant struggles. In their current context they are proving to be increasingly disempowering, ineffectual and demoralizing. Why is this so?

Demos are in many ways left over from the last great upsurge in struggle. Throughout the 20th century, the working class engaged in long running militant actions: strikes, occupations,

pickets, etc. Rallies played a part in this. However since the early '80s the combative elements of struggle have become largely submerged, only to explode out in various direct actions. On the whole though the praxis of the Left focuses on just a strategy of demo after demo.

Generally these demos replicate all that is wrong with mass society. Small groups of “organizers” fight bitterly in meetings over slogans and speakers; groups of “activists” engage in hyperactively paced work to build the rally, such as postering and leafleting in an attempt to get the “masses” to show up. Those who then do show up are asked to follow a strict and regimented path, often marshaled, chant when they are required to chant and listen to speakers. The success of the rally is based on either the number of people who turned up, media coverage, or how many people joined the various left grouplets. They are generally regimented and boring. They seem to mirror the symbols of destruction (guns, hand grenades, etc) can feed this rest of everyday life: being ordered around by our betters.

The essential flaw is that the strategy of demos is based on mediating away the power of people to a different source. The argument goes that through a show of numbers or good copy in the paper, that the rally will convince the relevant authorities to change their mind.

There is a kernel of truth in this in that often the state will worry about the potential of demos to transform into more radical activity and thus change their behavior. On the whole though the demonstration is largely either ridiculed or ignored.

It is incredibly depressing when people go to a rally to protest, say, the increased bombing of Iraq, on numerous occasions and witness that the rally has no effect what-so-ever. Here a strategy of “protest as usual”, with its regimentation and ineffectuality works to complement the effects of the state: to convince people that they are powerless. Indeed the strategy of rally after rally is now thoroughly exhausted with numbers dwindling after the coalition military victory, and the “leadership” is fracturing as various Leftist sects battle for control and recruits.

This is not the whole picture and occasionally those of us who do turn up have a nice time, make our own networks, or break away from the marshals to take more combative action. In fact, globally more and more people are willing to defy both the State and the embodied statist ideology of the rally organizers. From heckling speakers to fighting the police, a conscious practical critique of pacifism has exploded onto the world’s streets, often to the embarrassment and disgust of the liberals and “cadre” trying to shepherd the multitude.

Militancy as Self-Militarisation

How can you celebrate a revolution with a rifle butt?

- Jacques Camatte

Outside of this, small groups of the multitude, often those that politically identify as “revolutionaries”, are trying (often in vain) to find more effective and potent methods of struggle. This is all happening in a context in Australia, where combative direct action has flared up in the last couple of years. Coupled with this is an increase in state repression and the sophistication and brutality of the cops. Whilst the often boring, rigid, codified and predictable debate between “violence and non-violence” rages, the reality is that on the streets, any attempts to disrupt the circuitry of Capital has to take seriously the issue of confronting and combating the state.

However, some comrades faced with increased state violence have reduced the questions of confronting the state to purely military ones: a question of physical strength and conflict. This

is a fundamental mistake. It is a truism that since capitalism is a social system based on violence that any attempt to overthrow it must be prepared to fight. It is also true that the process of insurrection, which often involves physical confrontation, is a crucial part of the upsurge for liberation. However violence in general is not only distasteful, it is brutalizing and the product of class society. The revolt against oppression is a revolt that hopes to remove violence permanently from our lives. The longer violence lingers the more it deforms and twists movements of liberation.

Firstly, it is important to realize that the unleashing of continual global militarization terrorizes people by confronting them with a seemingly endless cycle of violence. Revolutionaries who fetishize violence, who adorn the process of social liberation in the symbols of destruction (guns, hand grenades, etc) can feed this cycle. How can we celebrate the gun? We can celebrate the human in struggle, but not the commodity they use as part of the struggle. Indeed the fetishism of tools of war and thus the devaluation of human life is a continuation of the logic of class society. The question of confronting the violence and power of cyber-industrial civilization is a question of how can we manifest anti-power and anti-violence that can hollow out and topple the state and the market. We should be realistic about the violence inherent in Capital, we should celebrate all revolts of the multitude, but we should not however allow the necessity of combating the state twist the vision of liberation. If we do, in the current context we extend the terrorizing of social relationships and thus the feelings of powerlessness of the people. Revolution is the weaving together of revolt and dismantling hierarchy, not self-militarization.

Towards Festivals of Refusal

We can fight it only by showing an equally strong bond of friendship and trust. Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open.

- Albus Dumbledore

Stopping war and the revolution against the empire of capital are one and the same. Militarization is a direct challenge to the recent upsurge of proletarian fury and self-activity, and war will always exist whilst class society exists. As a general point then the best way to stop war is to keep on fighting. The multiplicity of revolts – large and small, overt and covert - must keep on going, building, circulating and intertwining. However the broader struggle is difficult, if not impossible unless it faces the challenges of potentially endless militarization.

Two difficult tasks loom: how to construct positive social relationships that allow the opportunity to revolt to manifest; and how to manifest revolts which will allow the construction of positive social relationships. What we need is to actualize revolts of insurgent desire.

If the drive behind militarization is to reinforce the governmentality of the population then the best thing to do is to be as ungovernable as possible. I imagine the only thing that will prevent war and push back militarization is a general wave of disobedience and defiance, a society-wide mutiny that through its own actions makes the continuation of the status quo impossible. This mutiny would have no “leaders” and take countless forms of defiance and non-compliance. Thus no single group or single action can spark it off. However we can make bold strokes that increase the power and strength of the weave of revolt and inspire others to do the same.

Firstly, whilst the “realists” of various social democratic and Leninist groups and the few anarchist rackets desperate to look “hard” may scoff at counter-culture, never has it been more relevant. Never before has dancing and socializing, forming friendships and feelings of autonomy and rebelliousness been so important. To put it another way, the micropolitical revolts and mutations that make up counter-culture begin to pull at the atrophied nature of everyday life and create/mutate new pathways of living. Here can we see the seed of the future. So go ahead, put on that gig, pirate that CD, write that zine, take those pills and go dancing. (As always I recommend listening to thrash 7 inches – if this can be done from the aircraft carrier you have just squatted, all the better.)

If the move to militarization works to secure the rule of Capital, by subjecting the world to a global war machine and by further atomizing personal relationships, we can fight back by both monkey-wrenching nodes of the machinery and simultaneously beginning to re/form a community of struggle. To me the task then is to begin to pick our own battles, select sites of military power and attack them in ways that both work to halt their operation and simultaneously bring new ways of living into being. These acts in themselves may not be enough, but in concert with other autonomous activities they may just begin to open the door to rebellions that can dig the grave for Empire.

Post-script

As the cameras turn away from the rubble of Baghdad the official voices of adjudication have declared the war a “victory”. Those on the Right triumphantly proclaim the vindication of the U.S. Administration and laud the prospects for freedom and democracy. Those on the Left rub their hands and worry that this victory signals the return of imperialism and a defeat for freedom and democracy. Both sides only see the clash as one between two nations states and equate victory with the Coalition’s triumph over the Baathists. But this war was not about a clash between two states as much as it was about securing the entire global order of states. There was no doubt that the Coalition’s armed forces were going to easily smash the Iraqi army. The entire war was about securing the continuing reign of global capital in a time where the entire order is increasing divided and bankrupt.

If there was a central goal, it was the unleashing of “shock and awe” (militarily and ideologically) to terrorize the global multitude and thus re-enforce our obedience. Did it work? Just like the last Gulf War, huge sections of the Iraq army deserted. In other words they refused the basic lie of nation states: that we should lay down our lives for them. If anything, this act of mass defiance rather than signaling the end of rebellion amongst the oil proletariat is testament to their continuing ungovernability and self-organisation.

Waves of mass defiance also swept the globe. Whilst often the mass rallies were liberal in tone and passive in nature, increasingly large sections of them challenged the authority of both the state and the official organizers. In Sydney, Australia, student anti-war rallies defied their Leninist marshals and were transformed into combinations of roving festivals and direct confrontations with the police. Young people of mainly Islamic and Middle-Eastern backgrounds rebelled against the extra policing that they had subjected them to and exhibited a great willingness to directly fight the state. At the demonstrations in Canberra, speakers were heckled, people refused to follow the established march routes and eventual a group marched on parliament house

confronting the police there. Graffiti and other forms of low level property damage (include writing "NO WAR" in gigantic letters on the Sydney Opera House) are widespread. So much so the in Wollongong, the Returned Services League has had to organize vigilante groups to protect war memorials.

These are just examples of a global rebellion. It is this rebellion that was so worrying Chirac and Schroeder. Europe's original "opposition" to the war was not based on any commitment to political liberalism, but rather was an attempt to marshal old liberal and social democratic ideologies to fend off revolt. What the French state realized is still plain to see (if you look through the digital-smoke of the simulacrum): that the global order of capital can not create a harmonious mode of operation in the face of continuing revolt. The so-called victory has not stopped this revolt. If anything it has deepened it further by chipping away the consensus and compliance that civilization requires for normal operation. The response to this will be of course be more militarisation: more surveillance, more police, more violence, more terror. So much so that protesters attempting to interfere with the running of a detention center in the South Australian desert faced a raid by police armed with machine guns. This was the first time in recent memory that this has happened.

Will increased direct state repression and a neo-conservative political culture of unfreedom secure a future for the cyber-industrial civilization of Capital? The confusion we are faced with is the weave of oppression and resistance. We refuse the rule of Capital, but we are inside Capital and in many ways it is in us; thus living resistance to civilization is a blur of hope and despair. However, if anything the war shows that capitalism cannot reach its own totalitarian fantasies: often attempts to govern work to strip away at the governmentality of the people. New waves of proletarianisation, of social control may defeat struggles here and there, but they move on, grow and erupt elsewhere. Pertinent question remain, liberation may not be inevitable. However for all the bluster it seems at this point that even in the face of smart bombs, embedded journalists and Saving Private Lynch, the multitude will not be terrorized.

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Total Liberation – Zero War
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