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Middle East

So-called axis of resistance

- Features -

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Joseph Daher discusses regional and multipolar imperialism, the limits of Iranian resistance, and the international path toward Palestinian liberation.

The ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel, which had conducted a genocidal war on Palestinians in Gaza for over a year, poses strategic questions for the Palestinian liberation struggle and those in solidarity with it. Up till now, the dominant strategy has been to cultivate an alliance with Iran's so-called "Axis of Resistance" to back military assaults on Israel, but that network has suffered devastating setbacks from the combined might of Israel and the U.S.

Israel's repeated assassination of Iranian leaders and direct attacks on Iran itself have exposed the weaknesses and challenges Iran faces in the region. Tel Aviv's brutal war on Lebanon significantly damaged Hezbollah, the jewel in the crown of Iran's Axis, and collectively punished the Lebanese people, particularly Hezbollah's base in the country's Shia population. The fall of Iran's other close regional ally, Bashar al-Assad, has further undermined the Axis. Only the Houthis in Yemen have survived the onslaught relatively intact.

Of course, Israel did not accomplish its main goals in Gaza of destroying Hamas and ethnically cleansing the population, and it has been discredited and delegitimized globally as a genocidal, settler-colonial, apartheid state. Nevertheless, the strategy of military resistance to Israel based on support from the Axis has shown its limitations if not its inability to win liberation. So, what have we learned about the Axis? What is its future? What do the region's masses think of the Axis? What is the alternative to the military strategy against Israel? How should the international Left position itself in these strategic debates?

Origins and development of Iran's so-called "Axis of Resistance"

In the 2000s, the Iranian regime expanded its influence in the Middle East, primarily through The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)). It took advantage of the defeat suffered by the U.S. and its allies in their so-called War on Terror in the Middle East and Central Asia. George Bush's ambition for regional regime change was blocked by resistance to the U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Iran secured allies with Iraq's various Shia Islamic fundamentalist parties and militias and their representatives in state institutions, becoming the most influential regional power in the country.

Iran also increased its influence in Lebanon mainly through its alliance with Hezbollah, which has grown in popularity after its resistance against Israel's 2006 war on Lebanon. Since the mid-1980s, Tehran has supported Hezbollah, providing it with funding and arms. In the 2010s, the Iranian regime also strengthened its relations with other organizations in the region, particularly the Houthi movement in Yemen, especially after Saudi Arabia's war on the country in 2015. Since then, Iran has provided the Houthis with military support. In addition, Tehran struck a close alliance with Hamas in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Iran's regional alliance reached its peak in the late 2010s with Hezbollah dominating the political scene in Lebanon, the Iraqi militias asserting their power, Iran's own forces combined with those of Hezbollah backing Assad's counter-revolution in Syria, and the Houthis securing a truce with Saudi Arabia. The IRGC has been the main agent in consolidating the Axis. It is to some extent a state within the state in Iran, combining military force, political influence, and control over a major sector of the national economy. It has carried out armed interventions in Iraq,

Syria, and Lebanon.

Pursuing regional power not liberation

Iran has been attempting to achieve a regional balance of power against Israel and the U.S. as well as pursue its own military and economic aims in the region. The regime views any challenge to its influence in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and the Gaza Strip, whether from below by popular forces or from Israel, other regional powers, and the U.S. as a threat to their interests. Its policy is entirely driven by its state and capitalist interests, not some liberatory project.

That explains why Iran and its allies in the Axis oppose not just other antagonistic powers, but also popular struggles for democracy and equality. The Iranian regime denies its workers basic rights to organize, collectively bargain, and strike. It crushes any protests, arresting and jailing dissidents, tens of thousands of whom languish as political prisoners in the country's prisons. The regime imposes national oppression on Kurds as well as people in Sistan and Baluchistan repeatedly provoking resistance, most recently in 2019. It also subjects women to systematic oppression, creating conditions so intolerable that it triggered the mass movement "Woman, Life, Freedom" in 2022.

Teheran also opposes popular protests against its allies in the Axis. It condemned mass protests in Lebanon and Iraq in 2019, claiming that the United States and its allies were behind them in spreading "insecurity and unrest." In Syria, Iran supplied its forces, fighters from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Hezbollah's militants as ground troops while Russia mobilized its air force to back Assad's brutal counter-revolution against the democratic uprising in 2011.

Iran's allies in the Axis have also crushed popular movements. In Lebanon, Hezbollah has collaborated with the rest of the country's ruling parties, despite their disagreements, in opposing social movements that have challenged their sectarian, neoliberal order. For example, they united against the Lebanese Intifada of October 2019. Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, claimed the uprising was financed by foreign powers and sent party members to attack demonstrators.

In Iraq, militias and parties allied with Iran, such as the Popular Mobilization Units, have repressed popular struggles. They launched a violent campaign of assassination and repression of civilian protesters, organizers, and journalists, killing several hundred and wounding several thousand. Both Hezbollah and the Iraqi militias justified their repression of protests in 2019 by claiming they were the catspaws of foreign powers. In reality, these were the expressions of aggrieved people fighting for legitimate demands to reform their countries, not carrying out some hidden agenda of another state. That's why activists raised slogans like "Neither Saudi Arabia, Nor Iran" and "Neither USA, Nor Iran."

Truth be told, Iran is not a principled or consistent opponent of U.S. imperialism. For instance, Iran collaborated with U.S. imperialism in its invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. Nor is Iran a reliable ally of Palestinian liberation. For example, when Hamas refused to support Assad's regime and its brutal crackdown on the Syrian uprising in 2011, Iran cut its financial assistance to the Palestinian movement.

That changed after Ismael Haniya replaced Khaled Meshaal as the leader of Hamas in 2017, restoring closer relations between the Palestinian movement, Hezbollah, and Iran. But the schisms between Iran and Palestinians remain, especially on the question of Syria. Large sections of Palestinians in occupied territories and elsewhere celebrated the fall of Iran's ally Assad, who was widely seen as a murderous tyrant and enemy of the Palestinians and their cause.

Moreover, Hamas's alliance with Iran has been criticized by segments of Palestinians in Gaza, even from those close to Hamas's base. For example, a group of Palestinians tore down a billboard in Gaza City in December 2020 with a giant portrait of the late General Qassem Soleimani, who had commanded Iran's Quds Force, just days before the first anniversary of his death. Washington's air strike that killed Soleimani in Baghdad in 2020 was condemned by Hamas, and Haniyeh even traveled to Tehran to attend his funeral.

These groups of Palestinians denounced Soleimani as a criminal. Several other signs and banners with Soleimani's portrait were also vandalized. In just one video, an individual called the Iranian leader a "killer of Syrians and Iraqis."

All this demonstrates that Iran and its allies have played a counter-revolutionary role in various countries of the region, opposing popular protests for democracy, social justice, and equality. They were never an Axis of Resistance, but an alliance committed to their members' self-preservation and assertion of regional power.

"The Axis of Restraint"

This reality was confirmed by Iran's response to Hamas's October 7 attack and Israel's genocidal war in Gaza. While the Iranian regime affirmed its support for Hamas and the Palestinians, it consistently sought to avoid any generalized war with Israel and the U.S. out of concern for its survival in power. Because of this, Iran restrained its responses to Israel's repeated strikes against Iranian and Hezbollah targets in Syria and its assassinations of senior Iranian officials, including in Iran itself.

Tehran initially tried to put pressure on the United States by ordering pro-Iranian militias in Iraq and Syria to attack U.S. bases in Syria, Iraq, and to a lesser extent Jordan. However, after the U.S. airstrikes in February 2024, Iran reduced these attacks to a minimum. Only the Houthis in Yemen continued to target commercial ships in the Red Sea and launch some missiles against Israel.

Iran did conduct military operations directly against Israel for the first time since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, but always in a calculated manner designed to avoid any generalized confrontation. Each exchange between the two powers proves this. In April 2024, Iran launched Operation True Promise in response to Israel's missile strike on the Iranian embassy in Damascus on April 1, which killed sixteen people, including seven members of the IRGC and the commander of the Quds Force in the Levant, Mohammad Reza Zahedi.

Before Iran retaliated, it gave its allies and neighbors 72 hours' notice so they would have time to protect their airspace. Given this warning, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates helped neutralize the attack by sharing information with Israel and the U.S. The Saudi and Iraqi governments also allowed U.S. Air Force tanker planes to remain in their airspace to support U.S. and allied patrols during the operation.

Only after all this, did Iran launch three hundred drones and missiles at Israel, but this attack was largely symbolic and calculated to avoid causing real damage. The drones took hours to reach their destination and were easily identified and shot down. Iran importantly did not call on its allies like Hezbollah to join its attack. After the operation, Iran's Supreme National Security Council declared that no further military action was planned and that it considered the "matter closed."

In other words, Iran carried out the strike primarily to save face and deter Israel from continuing its attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus. In doing so, the Iranian regime made clear that it wanted to avoid a regional war with Israel and especially any direct confrontation with the U.S. Iran acted primarily to protect itself and its network of

allies in the region.

Tehran then launched a second attack of nearly 200 missiles on Israel on October 1 to “avenge” the assassinations of Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. While this was certainly an escalation on Iran’s part, it was entirely designed to prevent the loss of its credibility among its allies and Lebanese supporters Hezbollah. Yet again, the attack was limited and done in such a way as to minimize confrontation with Israel and the U.S.

It was so unconvincing as a deterrent that on October 26, Israel launched three more waves of strikes against Iran’s air defense systems, around energy sites, and missile manufacturing facilities. Tel Aviv had also wanted to bomb Iranian nuclear and oil sites but was restrained by the U.S. Several Arab countries, with which Israel maintains direct or indirect relations, also refused to let Israeli bombers and missiles fly over their territory. Nonetheless, the attacks revealed Iran’s vulnerability.

Its regional allies were similarly exposed both in their weakness and their restraint in response to Israel’s genocidal war. While Hezbollah did launch strikes into northern Israel, these were again limited and largely symbolic. And Israel called its bluff. It responded with a brutal state terrorist attack by detonating rigged pagers carried by Hezbollah’s cadres, killing untold numbers of civilians in the process. It also launched a brutal war into southern Lebanon, decimating Hezbollah as a military force and collectively punishing its supporters in the Shia population. As a result, Hezbollah has been significantly weakened.

On top of that, Iran lost its other key ally, Assad’s regime in Syria when forces toppled his regime almost without a fight. Assad was never an ally of the Palestinian liberation struggle. His regime had kept peace on its borders with Israel and, in his counter-revolutionary war in Syria, he attacked Palestinians in the Yarmouk refugee camp and elsewhere. That’s why large sections of the Palestinians celebrated the fall of the Syrian regime.

With Assad’s fall, however, Iran lost its Syrian base for logistical coordination, arms production, and arms shipments throughout the region, especially to Hezbollah. All of this has significantly weakened Tehran, both internally and regionally. That is why Iran has an interest in destabilizing Syria after the fall of the regime by fomenting sectarian tensions through its remaining networks in the country. It does not want a stable Syria, especially one with which its regional rivals can strike an alliance.

The only one of Iran’s allies that remains relatively intact is the Houthis in Yemen. Before the ceasefire, Israel repeatedly bombed Houthi forces in an attempt to weaken it and Iran’s Axis. In December 2024, Tel Aviv stepped up its campaign of strikes on ports in Hodeida, al-Salif, and Ras Isa controlled by the Houthis in order to undercut their economic base, which is derived from port taxes, customs duties, and oil shipments, reduce their military capabilities, and block Iranian weapon shipments.

Israel also wanted to interrupt Houthi attacks on merchant ships in support of Hamas and the Palestinians. These had disrupted shipping in the Bab el-Mandeb passage between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, a passage through which up to 15 percent of global maritime trade passes.

As a direct result, Egypt lost considerable revenue when international shipping was diverted away from the Suez Canal to other routes. Israel’s southern port of Eilat was also paralyzed. In response to this threat to global capitalism, the U.S., Britain, and Israel launched missile strikes and bombing campaigns against Houthi targets.

While Iran promised to retaliate against Israel, it did little in the end, again wanting to avoid any direct war with Israel and the U.S. All this demonstrates that Iran’s main geopolitical objective is not to liberate Palestinians, but to use

them as leverage, especially in its relations with the United States.

Similarly, Iran's passivity in response to Israel's war against Lebanon and its assassination of Hezbollah's key political and military leaders has further demonstrated that its first priority is to protect its own geopolitical interests and the survival of its regime. That includes reaching a modus vivendi with the U.S. itself. Indeed, President Massoud Pezeshkian and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's main goal is to cut some kind of deal with Washington, get it to lift the crippling sanctions on its economy, and normalize relations with the United States.

Iran, Russia, and Pursuit of Multipolarity

At the same time, Iran's weakened position has driven it deeper into the arms of Russia in an attempt to safeguard its regime. It recently inked a 20-year "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement" with Moscow pledging cooperation on trade, military projects, science, education, culture, and more. The agreement includes a clause promising that neither country would permit its territory to be used for any action that would threaten the safety of the other, nor provide any help to any party attacking either country.

The agreement entails cooperation against Ukraine, efforts to evade Western sanctions, and collaboration on the North-South Transport Corridor, Moscow's initiative to facilitate trade between Russia and Asia. Even before this agreement, Iran had already been selling drones to Russia to attack Ukraine while Russia had been selling Iran advanced SU-35 fighter jets.

The fall of Assad and Trump's return to the U.S. presidency certainly accelerated the finalizing of the partnership agreement. But it was mostly the result of rising challenges of both countries faced over the past few years. As noted, Tehran has suffered a tremendous setback in the Middle East, while Moscow's failure to achieve outright victory in its imperialist war against Ukraine has undermined its geopolitical standing. And both states are suffering the consequences of unprecedented Western sanctions.

Each country is desperate to find a way out of their predicament. Their agreement is part of that effort. It promises "to contribute to an objective process of shaping a new just and sustainable multipolar world order." This language of "multipolarity" is a cornerstone of Russian, Chinese, and Iranian geopolitical strategy. It is used to justify their own capitalist economy, imperialist or sub-imperialist policies, and reactionary social programs.

Unfortunately, some figures and movements on the left have adopted their rhetoric, promoting a vision of a multipolar system in opposition to what they see as a unipolar world dominated by the U.S. In reality, the emergence of more great and regional powers and a multipolar world of capitalist states is not an alternative to unipolarity, but a new and frankly more dangerous stage of global imperialism. While Washington's unrivaled rule was horrific, growing inter-imperial conflict between the U.S., China, Russia, and regional powers like Iran risks world war. Remember the last multipolar world order detonated World War One and World War Two as contending imperialist states battled for hegemony over global capitalism.

In addition, great powers like China and Russia that advocate multipolarity offer no alternative for the Global South nor working class and oppressed people throughout the world. They are capitalist states whose economic policies reinforce old patterns of underdevelopment; they deindustrialize developing countries, trap them into extracting and exporting raw materials to China, and then consuming imported finished products mainly from China. While the ruling classes of these developing countries may benefit from that arrangement, the working class and oppressed suffer unemployment, precarity, and environmental devastation.

More generally, China, Russia, and the rest of the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and others) alliance in no way challenge the Global North's hegemony over institutions like the IMF and World Bank, nor their neoliberal framework. In fact, the BRICS states are actually seeking what they see as their rightful place at the world capitalist table.

The expansion of the BRICS proves that it is not an alternative. In January 2024, its new members invited to join include Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. No one in their right mind can claim for instance that Argentina's state, ruled by the deranged devotee of Ayn Rand and Donald Trump, Javier Milei, offers a solution to the Global South, its workers, and oppressed. In reality, the BRICS states do not challenge the global capitalist system but contend for their slice of the pie within it.

Therefore, it is a disastrous mistake for any section of the left to side with one camp of imperialist and capitalist states against another. That does nothing to advance anti-imperialism let alone the struggles of workers and the oppressed in any state. Our political orientation should not be guided by a zero-sum choice between unipolarity versus multipolarity. In every situation, we must side with the exploited and oppressed and their struggle for liberation, not their exploiters and oppressors.

Our solidarity must not be with either camp of capitalist states but with workers and the oppressed.

Those on the left who mimic Russia, China, and Iran's call for a multipolar order align themselves with capitalist states, their ruling classes, and authoritarian regimes, betraying solidarity with the struggles of popular classes within them. Siding with those struggles does not and should not entail support for U.S. imperialism and its allies.¹ Our solidarity must not be with either camp of capitalist states but with workers and the oppressed. Of course, each camp of states will try to turn those struggles to their advantage. But that danger cannot become an alibi to withhold solidarity with legitimate struggles for emancipation.

If internationalism—the hallmark of being on the left—is to mean anything today it must entail support of popular classes in all countries as an absolute duty, regardless of which camp they are in. Such struggles are the only way to challenge and replace repressive and authoritarian policies. That is true in the U.S. as well as in China or any other country.

We must oppose any regime's cynical slander of legitimate protest as the result of foreign interference or challenge to their sovereignty. That is the politics of right-wing nationalism, not socialist internationalism.

Against Imperialism and Sub-Imperialism, For Emancipation from Below

Such an approach is essential, especially with the reconfiguration of regional power in the Middle East and the return of Trump to power in the U.S. Iran and its Axis has been dramatically set back. The U.S., Israel, and their allies are now emboldened. Iran's position in future negotiations with Trump is weakened, and its economy continues to deteriorate under sanctions and its own capitalist crisis.

Faced with this predicament, Tehran will likely reconsider its regional strategy. It could conclude that its best option may be to acquire nuclear weapons to strengthen its deterrence capacity and improve its position in future negotiations with the United States.

The left, especially in the U.S. and Europe, must oppose any further belligerence by Israel and the U.S. against Iran

or any other regional power. We must also oppose their economic war on Iran through sanctions, which disproportionately impact the country's working classes. No one on the left should support the U.S. state and its Western allies; they remain the biggest opponent of progressive social change in the world.

However, we should not fall for the politics of "my enemy's enemy is my friend" and support Washington's main imperial rival, China, nor lesser enemies like Russia. They are no less predatory and avaricious imperialist states, as Beijing's record in Xinjiang and Hong Kong attests, as does Moscow's similarly brutal one in Syria and Ukraine. Nor should anyone on the left support the authoritarian, neoliberal, and patriarchal Iranian regime and its reactionary and repressive policies against its own people and those in other countries such as Syria.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is an enemy of the working classes in Iran and the region and is not fighting for their people's emancipation. The same is true of Iran's allies like Hezbollah in the region, which have all played a counter-revolutionary role in their respective countries. And, as their record during Israel's genocidal war on Gaza proves, neither Iran nor any other force in the so-called "Axis of Resistance" have genuinely rallied to fight for the liberation of Palestine. Iran in particular has only opportunistically used the Palestinian cause as leverage to achieve its wider objectives in the region.

In the current situation, it is likely in the short term that U.S. imperialism will benefit from the weakening of Iran and its regional network. At the same time, the crisis of capitalism in the region remains unresolved, inequality continues to grow, and with that grievances among workers and the oppressed mount by the day. All this will continue to produce explosive struggles as they have over the last decade and a half. So, as we oppose U.S. and other imperialisms and regional powers, our solidarity must be with popular struggles that widen the democratic space for popular classes to self-organize and constitute a counter-power to their own ruling classes and their imperial sponsors.

What Way Forward for Palestinian Liberation?

Only such a strategy has the chance of transforming the region's existing order in a progressive and democratic manner. It is also the cornerstone of an alternative strategy for Palestinian liberation to the failed one of reliance on Iran's Axis.

As the last year has proved, Israel depends not just on the U.S., its imperial sponsor, to defend its colonial rule, but also on all the surrounding states. These have all either normalized relations with Israel, reached de facto agreements of mutual recognition, or offered at best self-serving, inconsistent, and unreliable opposition.

Moreover, Washington's rivals, China and Russia, have proved themselves unreliable. They invest in Israel, only offer symbolic criticism, and agree with U.S. imperialism's proposed but never implemented two-state solution, a fake solution that if it were ever enacted would at best ratify Israeli conquest and apartheid. As a result, Palestinians cannot look to any of the regional states or any imperialist power as reliable allies in their liberation struggle.

But Palestinians on their own cannot win liberation. Israel is a major economic and military power far superior to the Palestinians. And, unlike apartheid South Africa, which depended on and exploited Black workers, Israel does not rely on Palestinian labor. It does not play a key role in its capital accumulation process.

In fact, Israel's historic aim as a settler colonial project has been to replace Palestinian labor with Jewish labor. Therefore, Palestinian workers on their own do have the power to overthrow the apartheid regime as Black South

African workers did.

So, who are the Palestinians' natural, reliable allies in the struggle for liberation? The region's popular classes. Given their own history of colonial rule, the overwhelming majority identify with the struggle of the Palestinians. Moreover, Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestine has driven its people into all the surrounding states as refugees, cementing ties between the region's people. Finally, the masses in the Middle East and North Africa oppose their own governments' either collaboration with or fake resistance to Israel.

Thus, the region's popular classes are collectively oppressed by the state system, their interests in challenging that system are tied together, and they possess tremendous power to shut their economies down including the oil industry—a power that can undermine the entire world economy. These facts foster regional solidarity from below based on tremendous power capable of winning collective liberation against the regional state system. This is more than just potential.

Over the last century, the dialectical relationship between Palestinian liberation and regional popular struggle has been repeatedly demonstrated. When Palestinians resist, their fight has triggered regional struggles, and those struggles have fed back into the one in occupied Palestine. The power and potential of this regional strategy have been demonstrated on several occasions. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Palestinian movement sparked a rise in class struggle throughout the region. In 2000 the Second Intifada ushered in a new era of resistance, inspiring a wave of organizing that finally exploded in 2011 with revolutions from Tunisia to Egypt to Syria.

Similarly, inspired by these revolutionary uprisings a few months later, tens of thousands of refugees organized protests in May 2011 at the closest point to the borders of Palestine in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip to commemorate the Nakba and demand the right of return. Hundreds of Palestinian refugees residing in Syria were able to penetrate the Golan Heights barriers and enter Palestine, waving Palestinian flags and the keys to their Palestinian homes. Predictably, Israeli forces repressed violently these demonstrations, killing ten near the Syrian border, another ten in Southern Lebanon, and one in Gaza.

In the summer of 2019, the Palestinians of Lebanon staged massive protests for weeks in refugee camps against the Labor Ministry's decision to treat them as foreigners, an act they saw as a form of discrimination and racism against them. Their resistance helped inspire the broader Lebanese uprising of October 2019.

This history demonstrates the potential for a regional revolutionary strategy. The united revolt has the power to transform the entire Middle East and North Africa, toppling regimes, expelling imperialist powers, and ending both these forces' support for the State of Israel, weakening it in the process. Far-right minister Avigdor Lieberman recognized the danger that regional popular uprisings posed to Israel in 2011 when he said the Egyptian revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak and opened the door to a period of democratic opening in the country was a greater threat to Israel than Iran.

This regional revolutionary strategy must be complemented in the capitalist metropolises by working-class solidarity against their imperialist rulers. This is not an act of charity but in the interests of those classes, whose tax dollars are diverted from desperately needed social and economic programs into support for Israel and whose lives are routinely wasted in imperial wars and interventions to buttress Israel and the region's existing state order.

But such solidarity will not happen automatically; the left must cultivate it politically and agitate for it in practice. The left's most important task is to win unions, progressive groups, and movements to support the campaign for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions against Israel to end imperialist political, economic, and military support for Tel Aviv. Such anti-imperialist struggle and solidarity can weaken the imperialist powers, Israel, and all the other despotic regimes in

the region, opening space for mass popular resistance from below.

This regional and international revolutionary strategy is the alternative to reliance on Iran's so-called Axis of Resistance. That has failed. Now we need to build a genuine axis of resistance from below: the popular classes in Palestine and the region backed up by anti-imperialist solidarity in all the great power states rooted in popular struggles of working people against their ruling classes. Only through such a strategy can we build the counter-power to liberate Palestine, the region, and our world from the clutches of imperialism and the global capitalist system behind it.

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