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displaced by Americans in preparation for the 1946 'Operation Crossroads'  
nuclear weapons test

# THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF MILITARISM



# CLARITY CONTRA COMPLICITY

K. C. Sinclair

# The Downward Spiral of Militarism

by K.C. Sinclair

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In response to Israel's recent attacks on Iran, the Group of Seven (G7) at their annual summit issued a statement expressing support for the aggressor and condemnation of the attacked, the pretense being that in the near future Iran might develop nuclear weapons. This was despite the fact that both the International Atomic Energy Agency and American intelligence had recently indicated that Iran was not in the process of developing nuclear weapons.

The G7 claimed that "Iran is the principal source of regional instability and terror" in the Middle East but didn't mention that Israel is already armed with nukes and currently at war with four other countries in the region besides Iran. The G7 themselves have continued arming Israel with conventional weapons during this latest war, and the United States has recently engaged in airstrikes of its own, first against Yemen and then against Iran, following Israel's attacks.

Aside from Canada and Japan, all the other G7 countries currently possess nuclear weapons. Canada and Japan formerly hosted nukes for the US, the only country in the world to have ever used the weapons in combat. Toward the end of the Second World War, the US leveled the entire Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, massacring Japanese and Korean civilians. After the war, the US, France and the United Kingdom carried out hundreds of nuclear weapons tests in their colonies, causing mass harm to civilians, including displacement, starvation, sickness and death. The victory of the US over Japanese imperialism is what won the Americans the colony of the Marshall Islands, which they then used for their own imperialist interest in nuclear tests, to the great detriment of the Marshallese people.

Israel, an ally rather than a member of the G7, for decades has maintained a secretive nuclear program, developed partly in collaboration with imperialist France and apartheid South Africa. More recently, Germany has supplied Israel with submarines knowing that Israel would equip them with nuclear weapons.

Israel, unlike Iran, has never been a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, meaning that Iran has subjected themselves to oversight by the International Atomic Energy Agency but Israel has not. In response to Israel and America's latest attacks, Iran has now formally ended their cooperation with the Agency.

Israel and the G7 claim to be protecting the Western world from a potential nuclear threat but they themselves already are the larger and more present version of that threat, and their actions only increase the global nuclear danger. Their real struggle isn't to protect us from weapons of mass destruction held by foreign evildoers, rather it's to subject us to even greater domination and exploitation at their own hands. The claims of the nuclear-armed West to be concerned with the looming threat of such weapons in the hands of Iran should not just ring hollow but ring the alarm.

# Against Militarism

by Errico Malatesta (1902)

La Voix du Peuple ("The Voice of the People"), organ of the "General Confederation of Labor" of France has published, when the conscripts were being called up, a very successful special issue. It is adorned with beautiful evocative drawings, capable of showing, even to less developed intellects, what the eminently anti-worker role of the army is, and how the barracks are a school of degradation. And it contains excellent articles aimed at young soldiers, which explain to them the purpose for which the government arms them, and what they must do to not become the butchers of their brothers.

This is good and healthy propaganda to which all anarchists, all socialists, all friends of freedom and progress should dedicate their efforts; quite unlike the propaganda of the "democrats," who ask for decreased military expenses while professing love and respect for the national army and arguing that they want a reduction in the number of corps, because that way the army would gain in force and cohesion, while less would be spent. And quite unlike the propaganda of certain socialists (Enrico Ferri for example) who declare that militarism is the degeneration of the army.

For us, it is truly the very existence of the army that we want to destroy, however it is organized. It is loathing for the role of soldier — the role of slave and cop combined — that we must inspire in the spirit of the people and especially of the youth.

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## Military Service

by Errico Malatesta (1902)

There is currently much discussion among French comrades about whether an anarchist should meet the draft obligation, evade the draft, or desert.

Some say that the anarchist, who naturally abhors militarism and continuously makes propaganda against it, must at any cost refuse to wear the abhorrent uniform and take up fratricidal arms, in homage to our principles and to set a good example.

Others say that refusing service forces one to go abroad, where, for economic reasons and because of differences in language and customs, he is incapable of making propaganda, whereas it is useful and necessary to bring the spirit of rebellion and the yeast of anarchist ideas within the very ranks of the army.

We believe that the matter does not have a single solution, applicable to all individuals, under all circumstances.

Aside from considerations of personal advantage, which we shall not get into, it is certain that, depending on each person's particular talents and the dose and type of courage he possesses, some can be more useful by entering the army, making propaganda among soldiers and setting an example, when the case arises, of refusing obedience and open rebellion, while others better succeed by deserting and facing the vagabond life of a man in an illegal position.

The essential thing is that, within or outside of the army, one always keeps aflame his hatred against the institution, always keeps alive the spirit of propaganda and sacrifice.

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and to mould the minds of impressionable youth.

Self-immolation is not just suicide, it is not just about despair, but then again neither is suicide, which is a heart-rending affirmation that our lives are not simply the private property of another, and an affirmation that there must be more to life than suffering.

Certainly, it is commendable to try to prevent suicide as a general phenomenon, if not each individual act. Not only soldiers but also Indigenous peoples face disproportionate rates of suicide. But as the First Nations Health Authority in British Columbia puts it, they believe “the best way to prevent suicide is to promote protective factors such as family connectedness and emotional safety.”

“Eliminating suicide requires the concerted effort of our relations,” they further explain.

In other words, the solution is to change social conditions, to create reasons to live for everyone, not to morally condemn from a high-horse in an attempt to instill shame, as CrimethInc does, in all too Christian and colonial of a fashion. Shaming only contributes to the conditions that provoke suicide in the first place.

“Life must never become a habit,” wrote the socialist Anna Strunsky in 1915, describing these as words from a loved one, fictionalized or otherwise, Strunsky having been a fellow traveller of anarchists like Goldman and Kropotkin.

Life, Strunsky reiterated, “must be a triumph, it must be a consecration.”

In death, it was possible that “Life spoke with all her voices,” wrote Strunsky, tearing asunder the moralistic binary that CrimethInc would later try to rebuild.

The industrial unionist T-Bone Slim wrote in 1937 that “Scientists are toiling day and night to lengthen our lives.”

He affirmed, “We don’t want it, we want it thickened; it’s too damned thin now and if they stretch and stretch it, ’twill break in the middle.”

Our lives are not just a mere quantity of time to be lived in the service of oppressors, or of morality, a form of self-denial perhaps worse than death. Our lives are also qualitative, and they share the quality of being our own as well as shared with others, of being potential reservoirs of freedom and decisiveness. Our lives are to be lived not simply by being strung along by those who don’t have to live our lives, or even help us to better live them.

We owe more to ourselves, to our communities, to life and the living, as much as the dead, than a certain anarchist media collective is brave enough to even look at, let alone reflect back to us, or properly reflect upon themselves. In taking up the responsibility they won’t, we affirm our individual and collective freedom and refuse complicity with the oppression of our many companions and relatives.

Aaron Bushnell lives on in the collective struggle of others, and no pretentious media sophistry can ever change that.

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## Popular Power

The historic social movement against nuclear weapons and their proliferation was not initiated by colonizer nation-states but by activists and common people who spoke out, demonstrated and took action, and in doing so influenced the politicians.

Already in 1946, the English anarchist newspaper Freedom published a four-part series of articles against nuclear weapons and the State, written by Jewish American anarchist Marcus Graham, who’d already long been active in opposing both the World wars.

As Graham put it, “the revelations about the ‘democratic’ States’ construction and ultimate employment of the two atomic bombs that alone caused the deliberate murdering of several hundred thousands of innocent men, women and children ought to dispel once and for all time any illusion that the common man ever held of the ‘democratic’ State having any more regard for human life and welfare than the fascist, nazi or bolshevist State.”

The process for developing the nuclear weapons Non-Proliferation Treaty was introduced in 1958 by Frank Aiken, the Irish Minister for External Affairs. Aiken had formerly been a member of the anti-colonial Irish Volunteers and Chief of Staff of the Irish Republican Army. Mass protests against nuclear weapons took place in Japan and the UK the same year as Aiken’s political intervention.

The notorious Scottish anarchist Stuart Christie noted in his autobiography that the mass movement against the placement of American nuclear submarines in the Holy Loch near Glasgow at the start of the 1960s was his introduction to social resistance more generally.

## Conventional Catastrophe

Since 2023, Israel has dropped tens of thousands of tons of conventional explosives on the open-air prison that they have made of Gaza, far surpassing the amount used by the Allies against cities such as Dresden or Tokyo in World War Two. The majority of the housing and civilian infrastructure of Gaza has been damaged or destroyed, while aid is being used as a daily death trap.

Militarism, the endless pursuit by states and corporations of greater armaments and armies, always means the massacre of countless lives as well as the mass destruction of all that is materially necessary to sustain life. The grand leaders of the West and their henchmen have already long been throwing stones inside the big glass house that we all have to live in together, leaving the rest of us lowlifes to pick the glass out of our feet while we duck further incoming projectiles. The settler colonial project, whether in Israel or the Americas, accentuates and re-concentrates the brutality of militarism that is common to all states, making colonized peoples pay the highest price of all.

It’s plain to see that colonizers will not save us from nuclear catastrophe, nor the destruction of the Earth by means of conventional militarism and its contribution to climate change. Only the anti-colonial and anti-capitalist resistance of common people can be the impetus for the necessary social transformation.

## Combative Context

For the US and Israel, attacking Iran and neighboring countries isn't anything new. In 1953, a coup backed by the US and the UK overthrew Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh and installed a regime more to the liking of the allied countries of the West. The US then began cooperating with Iran on developing nuclear power, even supplying the country with their first reactor and enriched uranium. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 subsequently turned the tables on the US but also did not fully end all cooperation between the two countries. During the Iraq-Iran War of the 1980s, the US materially supported both sides, but primarily Iraq against Iran.

In their wars against Iraq launched in 1991 and 2003, the US used depleted uranium rounds, a type of ammunition that makes use of the byproduct of the manufacture of nuclear weapons and energy. This ammo is a chemical and radioactive pollutant linked to birth defects and cancer among Iraqi civilians. More recently, the US, which has the largest stocks of depleted uranium in the world, has been supplying the rounds to Ukraine for use against the Russian invasion, with further disregard for civilian harm on all sides.

The lengthy US-occupation of Iraq led to multiple insurgencies, one of which spilled over into Syria. The US, in fact, still maintains military bases in Iraq, and elsewhere in the Middle East, more than two decades after their 2003 invasion, which was at first materially supported by Ukraine, Canada, and the UK, among other countries.

In 2001, a US-led coalition, involving both NATO and non-NATO countries (such as Ukraine and Iran), invaded and occupied Afghanistan as part of America's inaptly-named Operation Enduring Freedom, which ultimately resulted in the ousted regime re-assuming power and the withdrawal of US forces, mission unaccomplished, in 2021. Afghan refugees in both Iran and the US meanwhile have been facing mass expulsion, while Afghan fighters, trained by the US, have been involved in both sides of the war between Russia and Ukraine.

In 2015, Saudi Arabia, with the extensive backing of Western weapons, launched a war and a land and sea blockade against Yemen, contributing to the humanitarian crisis in one the poorest countries in the world.

The US in 2020 assassinated Iranian General Qasem Soleimani with an airstrike in Iraq. Previously, in 2001, Soleimani and other Iranian military leaders had worked with US forces to capture the city of Herat in Afghanistan, but even this would not be enough to save him from his former allies decades later.

In 2024, Israel carried out an airstrike on the Iranian embassy complex in Damascus, Syria, killing 16 people, both officials and civilians. Since October of 2023, Israel has been launching numerous attacks against Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen and Syria, in addition to Iran.

Israel's ongoing military occupation and aggression against Palestine, both Gaza and the West Bank, is part of the ethnic cleansing they began in 1948 with the founding of the Israeli state itself, after they violently ousted British soldiers and police from Palestine. With the help of American, French, Czechoslovakian and British weapons, not to mention British training, Israel soon won their first war against Palestine and the Arab League.

the option he could have taken of staying alive, so as to continue participating in social struggle.

The only real paradox is that CrimethInc's analysis contradicts the reality of what actually took place. An entire social uprising resulted from Bouazizi's action, something that has yet to materialize due to anything CrimethInc has been able to say by staying alive, under much more privileged conditions than Bouazizi.

Berkman and Goldman, in *Mother Earth* in January of 1911, had written of the suicide protest of the prisoner and Socialist Revolutionary Party member Yegor Sazonov and "five of his fellow-sufferers in Eastern Siberia", which had led to "student uprisings" in Russia. The prisoners "hoped that this news would break through the prison walls, would travel to civilization and disclose the actual conditions of horror and torture prevailing in Russian prisons," and, "they were not mistaken."

The target audience, if it was that, was the people of Russia, not just the authorities, and the people became more than an audience, as they later did in Tunisia too. If one wishes to project their own more limited perspective onto Sazonov, Bouazizi or Bushnell, they have only themselves to blame.

## Affirmation not Despair

Beyond just the issue of tactics and their efficacy, CrimethInc are guilty of the kind of crude reduction, as described in other words by Hannah Zeavin in Bookforum, of self-immolation to suicide, not to mention the crude reduction of suicide itself to "self-destruction."

Bushnell "didn't have thoughts of suicide," his friend Levi Pierpont reminded us, "he had thoughts of justice, that's what this was about, it wasn't about his life, it was about using his life to send a message."

"Do not frame this as a mental health issue," About Face suggested.

Bushnell "was clear to the depths of his being about why he was doing it," Amani Rayan of Jericho reaffirmed.

But CrimethInc couldn't help themselves, stating that "too often, despair and self-sacrifice mingle and blur together, offering an all-too-simple escape from tragedies that appear unsolvable."

Bushnell and Bouazizi were too afraid and too quickly sought an easy way out, according to CrimethInc's condescending and confused narrative.

But the point of self-immolation is not simply to die, nor is it to encourage emulation. It is to take on the responsibility and the possibility of clearly taking action and speaking the truth, and in Bushnell's case, of irrefutably acting against one's own complicity within an oppressive system.

Ironically, it appears that it is precisely the undeniable clarity of Bushnell's action, identity and intent that provokes fear in CrimethInc, causing them to retreat into empty bluster about bravery, and into deflection, not only from Bushnell's meaning but also from their own sense of complicity as a civilian media outlet who've decided to represent the anarchist movement as a whole

## Cause and Effect

CrimethInc's answer to their own question as to the efficacy of Bushnell's action is that "Unfortunately, the authorities have never been especially moved by the deaths of US military personnel."

All the collective has to say about Bushnell's military identity is that state officials won't care about him and what he did, even though he was one of their own. This is despite Bushnell himself having stated that his intent was to refuse his own complicity as an active duty member of the Armed Forces, specifically in protest against the colonization of Palestine and in favour of Palestinian freedom. Bushnell did not say anything about persuading the authorities, only that the genocide in Palestine is what our ruling class has decided will be normal.

"As a tactic," CrimethInc claims, "self-immolation expresses a logic similar to the premise of the hunger strike."

"The protester treats himself or herself as a hostage, attempting to use his or her willingness to die to pressure the authorities," CrimethInc further explains, "This strategy presumes that the authorities are concerned with the protester's well-being in the first place."

"It is not willingness to die that will sway our rulers," writes CrimethInc, "They really fear our lives, not our deaths—they fear our willingness to act collectively according to a different logic, actively interrupting their order."

All of these claims are incorrect, and not only because Bushnell himself indicated otherwise, or because the positive response to his action by people in Palestine and Yemen shows otherwise, as important as all this certainly is.

In reality, neither the hunger strike nor the self-immolation tactic can be defined as being exclusively or inherently directed at persuading authorities to change course.

Furthermore, the best way to invoke fear in the powerful is not the only possible motivation for choosing a tactic. It is also possible to try to inspire others to action, and not just the exact same type of action as one has taken themselves.

The primary factor in use of the hunger strike or self-immolation tactic is the resistance of the person who engages in such an action.

The secondary factor is the response of the rest of the world, of social movements acting in solidarity with the hunger striker or self-immolator's fight, and in carrying on the struggle of the hunger-striker or self-immolator, which in this case is the struggle to free Palestine.

The world is not solely populated by politicians and officials, and there is historical precedent of social movements responding to and supporting hunger strikers and self-immolators.

CrimethInc in their article on Bushnell's action refer to their previous writing on the 2011 self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, claiming that the relation between the emergence of a powerful social movement and his action was a paradox, and condescendingly framing Bouazizi as a coward in relation to

The Czechoslovakian communist party had assumed power just a few months prior to Israeli independence and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics the year before had already lent their political support at the United Nations for the formation of the settler colonial state of Israel. Statists, be they capitalist or socialist, are always pragmatic enough to dehumanize and eliminate certain peoples whose very existence gets in their way, and to flip and pretend they were always on the side of the oppressed, when opportunity arises.

Jewish English anarchist Albert Meltzer had already in 1948 pointed to the role of communist Czechoslovakia's arms exports to Israel, having written, since 1939, several other articles on Zionist colonialism and its relation to British imperialism. He'd been present in Egypt during the Second World War, having been conscripted by Britain, and had discouraged disgruntled British soldiers from selling their weapons to Zionists.

## Allied Antagonists

At this year's G7 summit, the war in the Middle East was not the only case of mass carnage on the table. Canada's Prime Minister, following his participation in the declaration of support for Israeli aggression, also pledged an additional \$4.3 billion in aid for Ukraine, on top of the \$4.5 billion in military assistance that Canada has already offered since 2022, when Russia escalated into a full-scale invasion from their partial invasion they began in 2014. On top of all the material supplies, Canadians have been training Ukrainian troops and cops since 2015.

Canada's PM, at this year's G7 summit, also condemned Russia's "barbarism." Only last year, under a different PM, Russia hadn't been quite barbaric enough to keep Canada from lifting sanctions on their titanium. At that time, France's president urged Canada to lift the sanctions because the French company Airbus (the twelfth largest arms manufacturer in the world in 2023) needs the material and all landing gear for their premier A350-1000 jet comes from a single Canadian factory.

For the allied countries of the West, in both the G7 and the military alliance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Israeli aggression is grand but Russian aggression is foul, and even then, not quite terrible enough to stop the titanium from flowing freely when colonizer countries like France and Canada need it.

Then, there are the cases of the Canadian company Tallysman and the French companies Thales and Safran who have been caught with their parts showing up in captured Russian military equipment, in contravention of what sanctions remain. Companies and countries will always try to make money from both sides of a conflict as long as they can get away with it, even as they hand-wring about one side being the bad guys and the other being the heroes. Meanwhile, Russia has now reverse-engineered the Canadian antennas formerly built into their Iranian-designed drones. The technical development of militarism by one belligerent country indirectly benefits the opposing side, when it's not directly helping them.

For Canada, like other countries, war is good for business, and not just in terms of arms sales. In 2023, a deal was cut under which Canada will supply, for a period of 12 years, all of the uranium needed to fuel all nine of Ukraine's current nuclear reactors, along with additional reactors too, should Ukraine, with the help of NATO, manage to reclaim them from Russian occupation. No country

anywhere in the world, however, has any plans to help liberate the Native nations of North America from Canadian and American occupation. What Israel is doing to Palestine and Russia to Ukraine is considered by all countries to be a done deal when it comes to North America.

A Canadian-owned gold mine in the Central African Republic was seized in 2020 by the Russian government's Wagner Group and has been used ever since to help fund the war against Ukraine. The Canadian company (with primarily Chinese investors), Axmin Inc., which owns the mine, has only been concerned with seeking a pay-out and royalties through a legal process. Profiting off Russian aggression and exploitation of African resources is not a problem for them at all, even a potential benefit.

For more than a decade now, Saudi Arabia has been Canada's second highest arms export destination after the US, despite the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. Like the rest of the West, Canada is no saviour to the common people, but only a profiteer and benefactor to fellow aggressors and exploiters.

### **Ancillary Imperialism**

Ukraine, though currently neither a member of the G7 nor NATO, and still not a player on the level of the countries in those alliances, nonetheless serves as their junior partner in their imperialist sphere of power and profit.

Even with extensive NATO support, Ukraine undoubtedly remains an underdog in relation to the size and scope of Russian military power. Russia's invasion remains in the wrong and Ukrainian resistance, were it not simply militarist and by definition statist, would be in the right. As it stands, Ukrainian resistance to their own state's conscription efforts can't be any less legitimate than resistance to Russian state aggression.

Yet, Russia's imperialism doesn't cancel out that of the West. Much as Canada would not cease to be a settler colonial and by definition imperialist state if the US invaded. Much as the UK didn't become anti-imperialist by successfully repulsing, with significant Indigenous help, the US invasions of British North America in 1812-1814, or by freeing slaves held by American patriots.

Being relatively small and less powerful does not make a country anti-imperialist, even in the case of invasion and occupation by a greater foreign power. Belgium too was an underdog in relation to Germany in the First World War. Yet, at the time, they possessed the colony of the Congo in Africa, from which they brutally extracted resources. Being invaded by Germany did not cause Belgium to have a change of heart after the war either. Instead, they expanded their colonial empire, taking Germany's colony of Rwanda-Urundi as reward and only giving up the Congo decades later, after the anti-colonial riots of 1959 forced their hand.

Ukraine has no colonies of their own but has taken part in Western imperialism in its other forms. The participation of Ukrainian troops in the American-led occupation of Iraq in the 2000s was apparently unpopular back at home, and when Iraqi insurgents managed to oust the occupying Ukrainian forces from the city of Kut in 2004, the Ukrainian government's support for the war effort collapsed too, and they withdrew their forces from the country.

Ukraine's arms industry and ambitions of NATO membership, however, grew in

CrimethInc, for their part, have not even taken on the strength of their own convictions when it comes to the wilful and propagandistic participation of some of their own comrades in the Ukrainian military and its right-wing units, the Ukrainian state's conscription of civilians into that army, and the critical support for that conscription given by their state soldier comrade Dmitry Petrov to a German media outlet.

The collective is "internally divided over the issue of anarchists participating in military resistance to the Russian invasion of Ukraine," they informed the world in an article on the death of Petrov in combat (not mentioned by CrimethInc is the fact that he died fighting alongside comrades-in-arms of the far-right Bratstvo Battalion.)

Some in the collective, we're told, believe that serving a state military can never advance the anarchist cause, while others think it's understandable given the Russian regime. "If we reject state militarism" is supposedly an open question for anarchists rather than a definite line and practice. For CrimethInc, it may be possible to separate means from ends and still somehow be advancing anarchism rather than statism, but for others it is not.

Better to fight, live and die on our own terms than to serve as cannon fodder for the privileged authorities.

For Bushnell, the question of his own participation in the Armed Forces of the US and its relation to Palestine wasn't so murky.

The collective's text on Bushnell's action seems to above all serve their own interests, not the truth of the matter, or the struggle of the oppressed, or the refusal of complicity in oppression exemplified by Bushnell.

This also reflects, to some extent, a historic split within the anarchist movement around colonialism and war.

As the Jewish Lithuanian-American anarchists Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman put it during World War I in their print journal Mother Earth, "The humblest soldier who now refuses military service or is guilty of insubordination — and there seem to be many such instances according to private reports — contributes more towards the resurrection of the international solidarity of the people than all the diplomats, the Kropotkins and the Jean Graves."

Peter Kropotkin and Jean Grave having been prominent anarchists who flipped, becoming open supporters of the French, Belgian and allied camp in the great war for colonies.

Through victory in WWI, France won Syria and Lebanon; Britain won Palestine, Jordan and Iraq; and Belgium won Rwanda-Burundi; among other colonies or so-called mandates. The current Israeli and allied camp's colonial war against Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, the war of occupation that Bushnell fought so bravely against, is in part a result of that great war that some traitors to anarchism like Kropotkin championed but principled anarchists like Goldman and Berkman opposed.

Bushnell has found his place among the many great principled anarchists of history who opposed militarism and colonial war.

The collective writes, “We honor his desire not to stand by passively in the face of atrocity.”

But as Bushnell himself stated, at the time of his action he was an active duty airman refusing further complicity, not a civilian, or a mere passive bystander, or just a witness to a massacre. He had not been passive in the first place, so he was not breaking from his passivity, he was breaking from his complicity, as he himself told us.

CrimethInc, in this moment of their article, eschew Bushnell's specific identity and role as a member of the Armed Forces, blending him in with the larger crowd of empathetic civilians, the thousands across the country who “have engaged in brave acts of protest without yet succeeding in putting a halt to Israel's assault,” as the collective puts it.

CrimethInc writes that Bushnell was “one of those haunted by the question of what our responsibilities are when we are confronted with such a tragedy,” and the collective adds, “In this regard, he was exemplary.”

Yet, active duty members of the military do not have the exact same responsibilities or level of complicity as civilians under such circumstances, or under any circumstances for that matter. This distinction is part of the difference in their identities or roles. Bushnell was not exemplary simply because of his commitment to a certain level of action. His specific role within the military also played a part in his action and its social effect, as exemplified by the attention paid to it by military media outlets, veterans and conscientious objectors, as well as by civilian writers.

Technically speaking, it is not even possible for a civilian to take the same kind of action Bushnell did. There have been civilian self-immolations against American aggression, but it is not possible for a non-member of the military to take an action that specifically serves as a refusal of their own complicity in the army. Civilians can't be “exemplary” in the exact way Bushnell was, because they are not in the Armed Forces.

### **Humility and Responsibility**

CrimethInc not only subsume Bushnell within the mass of civilians taking action against the assault on Gaza but also within a wider collectivity that CrimethInc include themselves within by their use of the phrase “our responsibilities”, an abstraction that eclipses the fact that most, if not presumably all of CrimethInc's members are civilians rather than members of the military.

Bushnell and CrimethInc's responsibilities were not the same. CrimethInc did not even assume the responsibility of accurately relaying Bushnell's action and intent in relation to his military identity, let alone take on the responsibility of being actual members of the military who refuse to serve.

In Palestine and Yemen, resistance fighters honoured Bushnell's action, but have never done so for CrimethInc's texts, precisely because staying alive and scribbling, in itself, are not enough to warrant it. The civilian who stays breathing so as to stay blogging is in no way equivalent to the soldier who takes decisive action against their own complicity, whether they die or not. However, there are of course other things that civilians can do against militarism and colonialism.

the years following. By 2012, Ukraine had reached their peak, becoming the fourth largest arms exporter in the entire world, even beating out major players such as Germany, France and the UK.

Before and after the 2014 Russian aggression, Ukraine had no hesitancy in supplying arms to various repressive regimes, including India, Saudi Arabia, and Myanmar. Even following the start of the Rohingya genocide in 2016 and the military coup 2021, Ukraine continued to supply weapons to Myanmar, before apparently folding under pressure.

On the other hand, since at least 2022, Ukraine has purchased and imported Israeli weapons, in this case rifles and grenade launchers, for use in the NATO-backed war against Russian invasion and occupation. Israeli parts can be found in Ukraine's F-16 jets supplied by other Western countries. Ukraine also purchases and imports weapons from Turkey and has a free trade agreement with that country, despite their oppression of the Kurdish people.

Clearly, Ukraine does not support self-determination for all on principle, but only looks out for themselves and their allies, even supporting aggression and invasion by other countries, no matter how many ordinary people have to die. As if to emphasize this point, the government of Ukraine released a statement supporting the recent Israeli aggression against Iran. In fact, Ukraine has long maintained friendly diplomatic relations with Israel and framed Iran as their common enemy.

The President of Ukraine even more recently signed a decree that would pull Ukraine out of the anti-landmine Ottawa Treaty of 1997, showing further disregard for indiscriminate harm to civilians (not to mention other animals), beyond just the matter of depleted uranium rounds. In fact, Ukraine has been violating the anti-landmine treaty already since 2022 and has been receiving landmines from the US, which isn't a party to the treaty.

Both Ukraine's withdrawal from the anti-landmine treaty and Iran's ousting of the International Atomic Energy Agency stand as stark examples of how militarism can only increase militarism, regardless of which side has started each particular war. Meanwhile, the politicians sit safe behind their desks and podiums, or go out and hit the golf course, as others do their fighting, suffering and dying for them on the battlefield.

### **Armament Interlinked**

NATO's military support for Ukraine has been so extensive that by 2024, Ukraine had become the largest arms importer on the planet. Israel, for comparison, languished in 15th place between 2015 and 2024. The arms economies of Ukraine and Israel, we can further note, are interlinked beyond just Ukraine's limited purchase of a certain Israeli weapons, which nonetheless arrive in units by the thousands.

An exclamation point was put on this recently by Palestine solidarity activists in Belgium, when they blocked, occupied and defaced the offices of Optronic Instruments and Products (OIP), a subsidiary of Israel's largest arms company, Elbit. The mainstream media in both Belgium and Israel acted as if this targeting had somehow been a mistake, since OIP was producing arms for Ukraine, but as activists with Stop Arming Israel Belgium explained, all the money made by OIP “goes to fund a group up to its neck in genocide in Gaza and apartheid in

the occupied territories.”

“We can support the Ukrainian people without collaborating in the genocide of the Palestinian people,” they added.

A similar situation had already played out in Canada, where the armoured vehicle company Roshel, run by a former member of the Israeli Defense Forces, has been supplying Ukraine. The company has faced protests for their attempt to sell vehicles to Israeli police, these sales being put on hold by the Canadian government due to public pressure.

Yet, the links go even deeper still. Prior to Israel’s escalation against Palestine in October of 2023, the US had been supplying Ukraine via an ammunition cache that they have kept in Israel since the 1973 Yom Kippur War. This had been done with the understanding that the US would replenish the stocks of ammo should Israel suddenly need it, which is exactly what happened, as the US then rushed to provide rounds to Israel and sourced further supplies from South Korea to replenish their own stocks. The South Korean arms company, Hanwha, which restocked the US, then made a deal with the Israeli arms company Elbit to help outfit infantry fighting vehicles for Australia.

The US, meanwhile, had already been ratcheting-up production levels for Ukraine, and once Israel started their escalation against Palestine, the US indicated that this increased production might now benefit Israel as well.

US arms manufacturer General Dynamics, which produces the Mark 82 bomb that Israel uses against Palestine and other countries, was aided in the set-up of new facilities for the purpose of supplying more ammo to Ukraine by the Turkish company Repkon, sticking another pin in the chart of colonial oppression of Native peoples from North America to Kurdistan and Palestine. Half of the very same workers who helped produce the Mark 82 for Israel in Garland, Texas, were transferred to the new General Dynamics plant in Mesquite to then make ammo for Ukraine. Repkon’s US branch subsequently bought the GD factory in Garland and was awarded a contract by the US government to produce arms for Israel.

The US and Turkey haven’t been the only NATO countries involved in interlinked military purchasing and production in relation to the wars waged by Ukraine and Israel. Germany, in 2023, made the single biggest arms purchase in Israel’s history when they bought, with US approval, the Arrow air defense system from Israel, under the pretense of an increased Russian threat to Germany.

The company Dynamit Nobel Defence, a German subsidiary of the Israeli state-owned arms company Rafael, has been supplying both Ukraine and Israel with grenade launchers that were first field-tested against Gazans in 2009 before being supplied to the likes of the fascist Azov and 3rd Separate Assault brigades of the Ukrainian army. In early 2024, the Ukrainian state-owned arms company, Ukroboronprom, the largest weapons company in the country, cut a deal with the Rafael subsidiary, Dynamit Nobel Defence, to jointly produce German-Israeli arms within Ukraine itself.

The profits from one war fuel the other and the cycle of carnage continues. But beyond just the issue of the capital generated by and for war, there is also the issue of political leverage and the use of soldiers as cannon fodder, as was

movement against all forms of domination and oppression.”

CrimethInc’s approach draws an obvious contrast to the aforementioned military and civilian media outlets and individual writers who first focused on Bushnell’s role in the military rather than his anarchist identity, if they mentioned the latter at all, especially given that Bushnell himself did not mention his anarchist identity in his statement but did bring to the forefront his military identity.

CrimethInc in their article then proceed to quote Bushnell’s full action statement and describe what is shown in his video, including the fact that a police officer continued to point a gun at Bushnell as he burned, something that had also been reported by Task & Purpose.

CrimethInc go on to say that they had confirmed the identity of Bushnell and the fact that he “served in the United States Air Force for almost four years,” mentioning later in their article that he was “an active-duty member of the US military,” and asking, “Will this make any difference to the US government?”, a question framed to imply that Bushnell’s primary target audience was the US government rather than, say, the oppressed peoples of the world and his fellow members of the military who are complicit in committing militarist and imperialist oppression worldwide.

Bushnell did not explicitly say in his statement who his target audience was. He simply stated that he would no longer be complicit and that “this is what our ruling class has decided will be normal.” CrimethInc’s implication appears as an unwarranted projection on their part, and a further example of deflection away from Bushnell’s own agency and intent.

Bushnell himself was crystal clear about his action and how it related to his identity as a member of the Armed Forces, as many other people recognized and reaffirmed. But CrimethInc apparently have higher priorities than listening to and respecting the voices of others, even when asked to do so by that person themselves, even when that person has already put their life on the frontline, not just put their reputation online as CrimethInc has.

## Act of Refusal

A subsequent anonymous article in response to CrimethInc critiqued them for failing to note the specific dynamic of “the self-sacrifice of a white person in the US military [...] in solidarity with colonized people,” a factor which the anonymous author describes as “without question, important to Aaron’s action.”

But one needn’t have read this critique to see that CrimethInc’s article doesn’t attempt an analysis of the significance of Bushnell’s role in the Armed Forces, or of his act of refusal as a member of the military, other than to criticize the “logic” that they themselves project onto his tactic, to associate his action with the prevalence of suicide among military members, and to say that soldiers are taught that their willingness to die in service is their “chief resource”.

CrimethInc chose to emphasize their own sense of the importance of anarchism, their own analysis of the latest Israeli assault on Gaza, and Bushnell’s personal empathy with the suffering of Gazans, over and above Bushnell’s own words and action.



The following day, the journal *n+1* published an article by Erik Baker on the context of Bushnell's action, the use of fire in warfare and the history of anti-war self-immolation.

As Baker explained, "the purpose of lighting yourself on fire is not to encourage other people to light themselves on fire."

"It is," Baker affirmed, "to scream to the world that you could find no alternative, and in that respect it is a challenge to the rest of us to prove with our own freedom that there are other ways to meaningfully resist a society whose cruelty has become intolerable."

On March 1st, the website *Military.com* reported on a vigil that had taken place on February 28th in Portland, Oregon, where members of the organization *About Face* burned their uniforms as they stood behind a banner reading, "Veterans Say: Free Palestine! Remember Aaron Bushnell"

A little more than a week later, on March 10th, the news outlet *The Guardian* reported that the Palestinian city of Jericho in the West Bank had named a street after Bushnell.

"He was a soldier who with his last breath, despite the pain, shouted 'Free Palestine'," explained Amani Rayan, a Jericho city council member who grew up in Gaza and moved to the occupied West Bank at age 19 to study.

"This means he was clear to the depths of his being about why he was doing it," Rayan added.

On March 14th, Haifa-born Jewish scholar Ilan Pappé in *The Palestine Chronicle* wrote, "It was no accident that Aaron Bushnell donned his military uniform and broadcast live his heroic act of sacrifice over the internet."

A month later, in the online version of the Spring 2024 issue of *Bookforum*, Hannah Zeavin wrote an article on Bushnell's action and the tendency of some to collapse together suicide and self-immolation.

Zeavin noted that "psychologists and commentators rerouted Bushnell's message (freedom) to deprive it of one."

### **Circling the A**

The prominent American anarchist media collective, *CrimethInc*, reported on Bushnell's action on February 26th, explaining that they had discussed "all afternoon" how they should speak on it, and that they had received an email from Bushnell himself, in which he told them he would record and livestream footage of the event and asked them to "make sure that the footage is preserved and reported on."

Rather than first republishing Bushnell's own statement at the beginning of their article, or acknowledging that he first of all describes himself in his statement as "an active-duty member of the United States Air Force" who would "no longer be complicit in genocide," *CrimethInc* first say that upon consulting Bushnell's Twitch account they were able to determine that he self-identified as an anarchist, due to his username, 'LillyAnarKitty' and his user icon of a circle A, which, in the collective's description, is "the universal signifier for anarchism—the

illustrated when the US last year urged Ukraine to lower their age limit for the conscription of civilians into the army.

### **Calamitous Conclusion**

Militarism is truly a global system, not only deeply embedded in capitalist exploitation, the settler colonial elimination of Indigenous peoples and various forms of racist oppression, but also ecological harm to all life on Earth via its over-sized contribution to pollution and climate change.

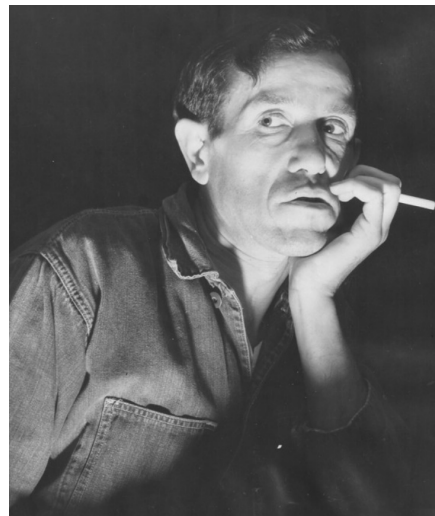
One good war deserves another. Each conflict justifies the next, leaving many if not all of their causes unresolved, and generating ever graver consequences for everyone, not just the active belligerents. The arms race threatens the very existence of the human race, along with that of countless other species.

"Without a doubt," proclaimed Japanese socialist and later anarchist Kōtoku Shūsui in 1901, "patriotism and militarism constitute the foundation upon which the imperialism practiced by the great powers of the present day rests."

If modern war is a political means to an end, and that end is imperialist domination and profit, we'd do well to better examine their roots in patriotism and militarism, as we were advised by our Japanese comrade so long ago. The stakes can only get higher, and pointing the finger at foreign countries so as to avoid dealing with the responsibility of our own is akin to sticking our heads in the sand as the world floods and burns around us and our neighbours cry out for help.

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Sources, references and resources at [historyiswhat.noblogs.org](http://historyiswhat.noblogs.org)



Marcus Graham



Stuart Christie

# Clarity Contra Complicity

by K.C. Sinclair

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One year ago today, Aaron Bushnell, a member of the American Air Force, self-immolated in response to American complicity in Israeli colonialism. This article serves both as an overview of some particular responses to that action at the time and as a critique of one response specifically.

On February 25th, 2024, the military-focused news websites, Stars and Stripes and Task & Purpose, in addition to various mainstream news sites, reported that 25-year-old Aaron Bushnell, a “Senior Airman”, had self-immolated outside the Israeli Embassy in Washington DC.

The military-minded media outlets relayed statements from Air Force officials, who confirmed that Bushnell was in fact an active duty airman and that he had died due to his action.

Task & Purpose offered further detail on Bushnell’s specific role in the Air Force, explaining that he had been “a cyber defense operations specialist assigned to the 531st Intelligence Support Squadron at Joint Base San Antonio Lackland, Texas, according to the Air Force.”

Both outlets included still images of Bushnell in uniform moments before his self-immolation and quoted part of the statement that he made during his action, where he said that he would “no longer be complicit in genocide.” These images and words were captured by the outlets from video recorded and released by Bushnell himself.

Neither outlet directly quoted in full Bushnell’s first two sentences, where he stated his name and then added, “I am an active-duty member of the US Air Force and I will no longer be complicit in genocide.” Instead, the outlets rephrased and relayed this information themselves.

However, the next morning Task & Purpose published another article where they did quote the rest of Bushnell’s statement, in which he had said, “I’m about to engage in an extreme act of protest, but when compared to what people have been experiencing in Palestine at the hands of their colonizers, it’s not extreme at all.”

“This is what our ruling class has decided will be normal,” Bushnell continued.

“Free Palestine,” screamed Bushnell several times, as the outlet also noted.

National Public Radio that same day reported that Bushnell had “made a will, and he specified that his savings should be donated to the Palestine Children’s Relief Fund and everything down to arranging that a neighbor would take care of his cat.”

Also on February 26th, the organization About Face: Veterans Against the War posted a thread on the Twitter social media site, where they offered “suggestions for talking about Aaron’s action.”

They recommended centring the “cause he sacrificed his life for — uplifting the catastrophic violence Palestinians are suffering at the hands of our government

and a call to action to do what we can to stop it.”

“Respect Aaron’s agency”, About Face wrote, “it’s ok to express our grief about the loss many of us feel, and important to be principled in not projecting our own wishes or judgements about his choice.”

“Don’t assume things we don’t know about Aaron’s state of mind, reasons, etc”, they suggested, “his words are strong and clear, we can stick to echoing what he said about his own reasoning and choice.”

“Do not frame this as a mental health issue,” About Face added.

Contextualize the tactic, they advised, but “be careful to not advocate (intentionally or unintentionally) for people to self-immolate.”

“Be careful to neither glorify this protest tactic above others, nor judge or denounce it”, About Face suggested, providing links for veterans and military members to the organization’s resources as well as the GI Rights Hotline.

In their thread, About Face also posted Bushnell’s full statement in a graphic including flowers (possibly poppies, anemones or wild roses; poppies being a recognized symbol of military remembrance developed by American academic Moina Michael, based on a pro-war/pro-militarist poem, ‘In Flanders Fields’, by Canadian military officer John McCrae.)

American army veteran, Ann Wright, released an article on February 26th as well, echoing an earlier one she’d written in 2018 on the historical context of self-immolation as an anti-war tactic, and stating that Bushnell’s “sentiments are echoed by hundreds of millions around the world who recognize the horrific Israeli genocide of Gaza.”

A couple of days later, on February 28th, the military and security media outlet Defence One, reported that US Air Force General David Allvin had been heckled at a speaking event, where seven protesters shouted slogans such as “ceasefire now”, “you killed Aaron Bushnell”, and “say his name.”

That same day, an American veteran of the US war on Afghanistan, Lyle Jeremy Rubin, wrote in The Nation that “when someone [Bushnell] commits an act like this, and leaves us with words like that, I feel obligated to take the person at their word.”

“And the words couldn’t be more instructive,” added Rubin.

Also on February 28th, Democracy Now interviewed Bushnell’s friend and conscientious objector Levi Pierpont, who said that Bushnell “didn’t have thoughts of suicide.”

“He had thoughts of justice,” clarified Pierpont, “that’s what this was about.”

“It wasn’t about his life,” Pierpont further explained, “it was about using his life to send a message.”

In the same segment, Ann Wright, referred to Bushnell’s action as “an act of courage, an act of bravery, to call attention to U.S. policies.”