

UNMASKING  
ANTIFA



# UNMASKING ANTIFA

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*Five Perspectives  
on a Growing Threat*

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## Introduction

When I proposed assembling a monograph on “Anti-Fascist Action” for the Center for Security Policy in February of 2020, it was not a name on the lips of most people. Indeed, only a handful of people had ever heard of the group. A few sharp-eyed observers had noticed the presence of these black-garbed thugs with their black and red flags at rallies and on college campuses, but for most Americans, it was a total unknown.

Now, thanks to back to back months of violent rioting in Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis, and other major progressive cities, “Antifa” is now a household name that was prominently featured in the first Presidential debate.

Despite its prominence, there remains a tremendous debate over the nature of Antifa. Is it, as Democratic Candidate for President Joe Biden claimed, a mere “idea”? Or is it a domestic terrorist organization, as President Donald Trump has insisted? If they are a true organization, how are they organized? What is their history? How do they operate?

The Center for Security Policy has put together a great collection of essays from a variety of authors weighing in on these questions.

Gabriel Nadales offers us an insider’s view of Antifa, as a former member who subsequently became a conservative activist and now warns against the danger the group represents. Nadales’s coverage of how Antifa members are self-motivated and self-recruited is particularly important. Erin Smith has an up-close and personal look at Antifa’s street-fighting tactics, including a deep dive into the nature of the “Black Bloc,” with key recommendations for law enforcement based on her experiences as a GOP activist from Northern California. Researcher Matt Vadum looks at the nebulous world of Antifa funding, its ties to the Black Lives Matter movement, and how major foundations have moved money through questionable “fiscal sponsorship” arrangements in ways that support the Antifa cause. My

colleague, J. Michael Waller looks at the international nature of Antifa, where it fits into a long history of violent leftist groups, and the role played by Cold War active measures in inculcating today's Antifa revolutionaries.

I am also pleased to include as well my written testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution, which was submitted for an important hearing—chaired by Senator Ted Cruz—on the threat Antifa poses to the free speech rights of all Americans.

I firmly believe this monograph will have something to offer policymakers, law enforcement officers, and the general public, as they grapple with understanding the true nature and threat Antifa represents to American security and the U.S. Constitution. While in each case the author's views are wholly their own and not those of the Center for Security Policy, I think each essay contains a piece of the puzzle to help audiences come to terms with the threat that is Antifa.

Kyle Shideler  
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# Testimony Before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee-Subcommittee on the Constitution

By Kyle Shideler

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## INTRODUCTION

**I**t is a great honor to testify today before the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on the Constitution. My name is Kyle Shideler. I am the Director and Senior Analyst for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism at the Center for Security Policy, a national security think tank founded by members of President Ronald Reagan's national security team in 1988, committed to promoting the interests of the United States on the principle of "Peace Through Strength."

For more than twelve years I have been researching the nature of ideological movements—both foreign and domestic—that represent threats to American national security and seek the overthrow of the Constitution of the United States. By studying networks organized along ideological, rather than strictly hierarchical lines, I became interested in the ideology and structure of the Antifa movement and have studied it with increasing emphasis since about 2015.

As a subversive and violent extremist international movement committed to anarcho-communist ideologies, Antifa is fundamentally committed to the abolition of the U.S. government and the violent overthrow of the United States Constitution. It is committed to the use of both subversion and violent extremism to enforce its political views by terrorizing American citizens. Antifa's activities clearly meet the definition of an organized criminal conspiracy and terrorism established by federal law.

Careful study of Antifa's primary source documents and recordings, and other materials that Antifa itself promotes and recommends to its cadres and supporters, provides open-source intelligence into the movement, its ideology, and organization. I hope that my analysis and conclusions will benefit our nation's lawmakers as they deliberate ways to improve the defense of the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

## HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY

As we have seen through organized violence across Europe, South America, and elsewhere, Antifa is an international movement with a long history. Antifa, or Anti-Fascist Action, identifies itself as the modern descendant of an organization of the same name established by the Soviet-controlled German Communist Party in 1932.

That organization existed for the explicit purpose of using street violence to disrupt the ability of Germany's political center—the democratic liberals, moderates, and conservatives—to organize during the waning days of the Weimar Republic. During these revolutionary periods, Marxist-Leninist doctrine emphasized the targeting of moderate and even center-left parties, seeking to alienate members of the political mainstream and force the political middle to choose between the Communist and the National Socialist (Nazi) party, to disastrous effect.

While the direct connection between this historical antecedent and today's Antifa movement is mostly conceptual, it is worth understanding Antifa in this historic context. Antifa exists for one purpose. That purpose is to engage in violence to prevent its opponents in the country's broad political center—mainline liberals, moderates, and conservatives—from politically organizing or existing in their traditional forms. The end goal of this violence is to terrorize the general public into silence and inaction, peel away a segment of the mainstream for tacit or passive support, goad authorities either

into meek acquiescence or violent over-reaction, radicalize frustrated or alienated elements of the population to further alienate them from America's founding principles and system of government, and to eliminate opposition to its efforts to undermine and ultimately overthrow the United States Constitution.

Antifa was reestablished in the 1980s, also in Germany, as the punk rock ethos of the German Squatter's Movement increasingly combined with the politics of Autonomism. Autonomism is an anarcho-Marxist ideology which was influential among Europe's communist urban guerillas of the 1960s and 1970s, including the German Red Army Faction (RAF), and the Italian Red Brigades that kidnapped and assassinated former Italian prime minister Aldo Moro and kidnapped American brigadier general James Dozier.

The ideological connection is such that the daughter of RAF co-founder Ulrike Meinhof recently described Antifa in a Swiss newspaper as the heirs of that German terror group.<sup>1</sup> Many of Antifa's most basic organizational structures such as the infamous "black bloc" came out of this period, as does their instinct to set up "autonomous zones," which we've seen play out across American cities during the ongoing unrest.

Significantly, the RAF was an asset of the Stasi, the security apparatus of the Communist East German regime, which in turn was under control of the Soviet KGB. We know this from Stasi documents discovered after the collapse of East Germany in 1989-1990.

In the United States, Antifa's development followed a similar pattern as it did in Germany. However, Antifa in the U.S. used slightly different terminology and foreign intelligence support for certain elements appear to have come from Cuba. In the United States we saw the rise of "Anti-Racist Action" (ARA) in the 1980s, first in several cities across the country, and then forming regional networks. ARA groups were oriented at recruiting among America's punk rock youth and aimed at expelling those they perceived as "neo-Nazis" from the punk music scene.

Present at the founding of the ARA in the United States were members of an organization known as the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee (JBAKC). The John Brown Anti-Klan Committee was founded as a front organization of the Weather Underground splinter group, the May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization (M19).<sup>2,3</sup> M19 was most famously responsible for a 1981 Brinks armored car robbery in Nyack, New York, as well as a number of other armed robberies and bombings, including the 1983 bombing of the United States Senate.

The John Brown Anti-Klan Committee promoted its view that the entire American system of government is inherently white supremacist, which was a principal position of the Weather Underground and later M19. The Committee's slogan "No KKK, No Fascist USA" is emblematic of this position and is still chanted today by Antifa. The organized violence we have seen directed against law enforcement in the United States at any rally or protest where Antifa is present reflects how this view has been internalized and weaponized. The then-extremist view that America's government and its constitutional founding principles are racist and therefore illegitimate has become mainstreamed over the past four decades.

Like an electrostatic force, the movement continues to push larger elements of the public to become more and more "anti-racist" or "anti-fascist"—as if the vast majority of Americans are not already that way—to compel normal people to believe that lack of militancy is in itself racist and fascist.

The continuity from older movements to present-day violent extremism is seen in the case of Susan Rosenberg, Vice Chair of Thousand Currents, an organization that served as the fiscal sponsor of the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation.

Rosenberg is a career revolutionary—a violent extremist who was a member of the May 19<sup>th</sup> Communist Organization. Early in her career, Rosenberg stayed in Cuba as a member of the Venceremos Brigades,<sup>4</sup> which served as an assessment and recruitment operation for Cuban intelligence for the training and indoctrination of American radicals.<sup>5</sup>

## UNMASKING ANTIFA: FIVE PERSPECTIVES ON A GROWING THREAT

Emphasizing the racism of American society throughout her extremist professional career, Rosenberg was ultimately convicted of a range of terrorist-related felonies, from weapons and explosives violations to helping convicted cop-killer Assata Shakur escape from prison. Shakur, whose real name was Joanne Chesimard, was a member of the terrorist Black Liberation Army (BLA) who was convicted of murdering New Jersey state trooper Werner Foerster in 1973. Rosenberg helped Shakur escape prison and flee to Cuba in 1979, where Shakur still resides. President Bill Clinton pardoned Rosenberg, who had served 16 years of a 58-year sentence, in 2001.

This historical connection is important. Black Lives Matter co-founder Alicia Garza—herself described as a “trained Marxist”—identified Shakur as one of her inspirations for starting the organization.<sup>6</sup>

Thus we see the origins of the violent extremism of today’s movement to use racism as a pretext to ambush and murder American police officers, to demonize the entire police profession, and to defund local and state police forces.

Antifa’s Michael Novick is another relevant connection who establishes the historic relationship between the communist guerilla and terrorist movements of the 1970s and Antifa of today. Novick is former member of the Weather Underground terrorist group. He is a founding member of the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee and a founding member of Anti-Racist Action-Los Angeles.<sup>7</sup> Novick was recently identified as the web registrar of the Torch Antifa website.<sup>8</sup> Torch Antifa is one of the largest regional networks of Antifa in the United States.<sup>9</sup> In 2019 Novick travelled to Cuba as part of the 50<sup>th</sup> Venceremos Brigade, showing the substantial continuity of these movements.<sup>10</sup>

Another Anti-Racist Action founder, Kieran Knutson,<sup>11</sup> is a leading member of the Twin Cities General Defense Committee of the International Workers of the World (IWW), a labor union with a long history of radical organizing in the United States.<sup>12</sup> The IWW General Defense Committee plays an active role in helping to organize Antifa

activities. Knutson is no stranger to street-level Antifa activities. In 1996 Knutson was charged—although acquitted after a lengthy court battle—of felony assault.<sup>13</sup>

The details of these and other radical left extremists at the core of what has become today's Antifa/BLM movement are too voluminous to provide as testimony today, but they are a matter of public record. We at the Center for Security Policy would be pleased to assist this subcommittee with further information.

I mention these organizations and individuals only to establish that Antifa/BLM are not by any means a new movement, but reincarnations of older extremist organizations and movements, some with ties to hostile foreign governments. The young followers of radicals from the 1960s and '70s are now among the organizers, funders, leaders of young radicals in 2020. They have worked their entire lives for this moment. They are hardened through decades of street fighting, terrorism, murder, and imprisonment. Some have organized or fought abroad on behalf of foreign violent extremist causes. They have spent two generations or more building and training loyal and professional cadres who have organized in cells and networks across our country. They infiltrated institutions and cultivated financial support and have demonstrated an impressive return on investment.

## ORGANIZATION/STRUCTURE

Because of the anarchist ideology which predominates within the Antifa movement, members and supporters will frequently laugh off the notion that it is an "organization" in any meaningful sense of the word. However, the leaders understand themselves as anarcho-syndicalist, a hybrid of anarchism and Marxism-Leninism, the latter of which provides organizational doctrine and discipline. The anarchist half is symbolized by the color black; the syndicalist side by red. Hence the revolutionary heraldry of Antifa's red-and-black logo. This

alliance of seeming opposites has had firm roots since the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s.

American law enforcement and domestic intelligence have largely failed to understand the nature of the movement. Seeking a rigidly hierarchical organization, such as historically found in transnational criminal organizations such as the American Mafia or the Soviet-controlled Communist Party USA, some analysts have concluded, against all evidence, that Antifa does not exist in any meaningful sense.

This obsolete form of intelligence analysis of seeking out vertically integrated command-and-control is precisely what handicapped the U.S. from understanding horizontally organized or even un-structured networks like al Qaeda nearly two decades ago.

The reality of Antifa, as a diffuse bottom-up organization and horizontal network of networks, is better understood by law enforcement as somewhat analogous to a criminal street gang or perhaps an outlaw motorcycle gang. No serious intelligence analyst would say that the Bloods, or the Pagans Motorcycle Club, do not exist simply because they are organized principally in small self-identified groups, which taken together form national or transnational networks.

Yet despite claims to the contrary, the reality is that Antifa demonstrates an elaborate and complex but non-hierarchical structure. Websites linked to Antifa attract users who spend inordinate efforts discussing how Antifa groups can and should be organized, easily available to any intelligence professional who chooses to analyze them.

### ***Affinity Groups***

The most basic structure of Antifa is the affinity group. An affinity group is simply a small cell of individuals, known to each other, who agree to come together to participate in what they would call an “action.” Members might be actively recruited—as would have been

the case in old-style Communist Party cell model—or they might simply recruit themselves and choose to self-identify with the movement. This is a more modern form of recruitment which we have seen with many extremist groups, including Al Qaeda and ISIS.

Once joining an affinity group, members are expected to participate in activities which can range from distributing Antifa recruitment literature on a college campus, to “direct action” such as an act of sabotage or property destruction or acts of violence.

The pro-Antifa website and “autonomous worker’s collective” CrimethInc provides the closest to an authoritative definition:

An affinity group is a circle of friends who understand themselves as an autonomous political force. The idea is that people who already know and trust each other should work together to respond immediately, intelligently, and flexibly to emerging situations.

This leaderless format has proven effective for guerrilla activities of all kinds, as well as what the RAND Corporation calls ‘swarming’ tactics in which many unpredictable autonomous groups overwhelm a centralized adversary. You should go to every demonstration in an affinity group, with a shared sense of your goals and capabilities. If you are in an affinity group that has experience taking action together, you will be much better prepared to deal with emergencies and make the most of unexpected opportunities.

The fact that the radicals cite a RAND study from nearly two decades ago shows that the “swarming” concept is not new for analysts of foreign terrorist groups yet is practically unknown to analysts of today’s domestic violent extremists.

Affinity groups can range between four and twenty members, but generally the smaller numbers are preferred because decisions are expected to be made through unanimous consent, and smaller numbers facilitate both decision-making and operational security. Members may be participants in multiple affinity groups, each with a different emphasis of tactics and unaware of the activity of affinity groups outside their own spheres. Multiple affinity groups may come together into what is described as a “cluster” for a planned action



requiring more participants. If this needs to happen, each affinity group may nominate one of its members to participate in planning sessions, often called “spokescouncils.”

These organizational terms are not necessarily unique to Antifa. They are used by other anarchist, left-wing, and other activist groups which regularly engage in direct action. Groups committed to the Antifa movement may use other terms to refer to a similar structure.

Multiple affinity groups in each area may come together to form a single Antifa chapter, or there may be several chapters or groups within one area if there are enough individuals present. Not all Antifa groups adopt the Antifa name. According to a 2017 handbook entitled “Forming an Antifa Group,” produced by the pro-Antifa Website It’s Going Down explains:<sup>14</sup>

If the purpose of your group is to do public organizing where your members are clearly identifiable—organizing anti-Trump rallies or supporting refugees and immigrants—using the Antifa label and the traditional Antifa symbols will likely lead to blowback that could be avoided by naming your organization differently. ‘Las Cruces United Against Racism’ will not draw the attention that calling yourself ‘La Cruces Antifa,’ and using traditional antifa symbolism, will.

Old-school law enforcement and intelligence analysts will recognize the different naming as “front groups,” many of which had small and overlapping memberships to project larger numbers and broader support.

The handbook goes on to note that branding one’s group as “Antifa” carries specific “obligations” which include publicly producing information about local “fascist” targets and organizing counterdemonstrations to shut down opponent’s events. Every target of Antifa is “fascist.” Every target of BLM is “racist.” These terms dehumanize the target and not only justify but require the target’s total destruction.

Also noted as an obligation,

Support other anti-fascists who are targeted by fascists or arrested for Antifa-related activities. This could include supporting regional groups or organizing benefits and fundraisers for prisoners and injured comrades.

This support extends even internationally, with many American Antifa groups promoting and fundraising for the International Antifa Defense Fund, which proudly notes that it has provided financial support to over 500 antifascists in 22 different countries. In most cases this has included hospital bills and lawyers' fees, although in at least some cases it has included emergency "relocation" assistance.<sup>15</sup> While the overall numbers in dollars are low, the International Antifa Defense Fund represents clear evidence of organizational activity across national borders.<sup>16</sup> Again, this tradition goes back as far as the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, with Americans supportive of anarchism or communism, or tricked into thinking they were contributing to a fight against fascism, contributing money and expertise and even serving as volunteers in international brigades.

As noted earlier, city or even neighborhood based Antifa chapters can often join regional Antifa networks such as the Torch Antifa network. These relations provide additional mutual support, allow small chapters to create larger groups for direct action, and tie them into national and international networks to share expertise, skills, lessons, and manpower.

### ***Building Blocs***

During a major protest or counter-protest action, one will often see Antifa's maneuver element known as the "black bloc."<sup>17</sup> This is the large mass of black-masked rioters who typically confront members of another demonstration or First Amendment-protected event, target law enforcement, or engage in property destruction. While the black bloc is the most common for the Antifa trademark, technically

blocs can represent masses of protestors in any prior agreed-upon uniform color. Calls may go out to arrange a specific bloc color or wear other elements for propaganda purposes, or have certain groups, like women posing as angry mothers of peaceful protesters, wear yellow to generate headlines as protective “moms.” This color-changing tactic can also be used to help identify those who do not belong to the bloc and prevent infiltration.

Blocs are typically one of three types: Open, Closed, and Semi-Open. Open blocs permit any individual who wishes to answer the call to participate, provided they are wearing the correct bloc uniform. In these blocs, tactics and activities are typically limited for security reasons. They are typically used wherever large numbers are required but secrecy is not.

The closed bloc permits no outsiders to participate and is used when security and secrecy are most important. Closed blocs may, for example, lay in wait outside of police protected “free speech” zones or designated demonstration locations to ambush participants coming to or from First Amendment-protected rallies and protests.

The semi-open bloc combines the most strategically useful elements of both closed and open blocs. It allows the most hard-core affinity groups that intend to engage in direct action to hide within the mass of open participants who may not be aware of all elements of the bloc’s operation. It is not uncommon to see the core affinity groups break out from within a semi-open bloc in order to carry out pre-planned sabotage or violent action during a larger protest or distribute weapons and other tools for use by other members of the bloc.

The semi-open bloc is useful for the professional cadres to lure unsuspecting participants—untrained and naïve—and manipulate them into situations that put them in danger or harm. The purpose is to create real images of the unfortunate results and spread the imagery on social media to stoke more outrage against the police. New volunteers in the open bloc who show willingness to commit violence are then assessed for formal recruitment.

## ***Support Groups and Organizations***

Antifa relies on a number of organizations to provide crucial elements of support for its mission. Support organizations can be local, regional, national or international in scale.

At the national level in the United States, organizations like the Anti-Fascist Working Committee of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the General Defense Committee of the International Workers of the World (IWW), Refuse Fascism, and National Lawyers Guild (NLG)<sup>18</sup> all provide important services to Antifa operatives, including legal and financial support, political assistance, fundraising, and organizing. In the case of the DSA, IWW, and Refuse Fascism, members of those organizations may also double as Antifa themselves.

The National Lawyers Guild serves as a type of legal auxiliary for the extremists, supporting legal defense on the one hand, and running legal offense through litigation on the other. The NLG has been a legal support organization for anti-constitutional extremists for decades, and historically was identified an appendage of the Kremlin-controlled Communist Party USA and its fronts. A video of an Antifa cell headquarters shows an NLG pamphlet instructing what to do when approached by police or the FBI.<sup>19</sup>

In a given area many regional or local organizations, political collectives, and even private businesses also provide support for Antifa activities. Former Antifa member Gabriel Nadales has noted that most in the Antifa movement are recruited from within other political left-wing activist groups, especially those with a history of illegal or quasi-legal direct action such as certain violent extremist eco-activist and animal rights groups.<sup>20</sup>

Potential prospects are usually self-motivated. Many will join open blocs, or semi-open blocs as an individual, and may face a period of substantial evaluation and vetting before being recruited into or forming their own affinity group. Recruitment typically begins early, in high schools

and on college campuses among disaffected, alienated, or politically active students. Not infrequently, recruiters are teachers and professors.

Antifa cooperates with other organizations based on a set of statements called “points of unity” or POUs. These POU statements represent a baseline of agreement for working with the Antifa chapter, and regional networks of Antifa typically agree to these to facilitate cooperation. A model POU is Torch Antifa’s POU statement which reads:<sup>21</sup>

Points of Unity:

1. We disrupt fascist and far right organizing and activity.
2. We don’t rely on the cops or courts to do our work for us. This doesn’t mean we never go to court, but the cops uphold white supremacy and the status quo. They attack us and everyone who resists oppression. We must rely on ourselves to protect ourselves and stop the fascists.
3. We oppose all forms of oppression and exploitation. We intend to do the hard work necessary to build a broad, strong movement of oppressed people centered on the working class against racism, sexism, nativism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and discrimination against the disabled, the oldest, the youngest, and the most oppressed people. We support abortion rights and reproductive freedom. We want a classless, free society. We intend to win!
4. We hold ourselves accountable personally and collectively to live up to our ideals and values.
5. We not only support each other within the network, but we also support people outside the network who we believe have similar aims or principles. An attack on one is an attack on all.

The POU demonstrates anarcho-syndicalism and the goal of a “classless” society, a fundamentally Marxist strategic vision which, logically, requires the overthrow of the Constitution.

Other Antifa groups’ POU may vary slightly. The very first point makes clear that Antifa exists principally to deny the ability of others to engage in political activity or and to prevent citizens from organizing against the movement, and dehumanizing all opponents as enemies, which is anyone Antifa labels practically all its targets as “fascist” or “far right.” The strategy is to intimidate the public from participation in American political life. As author of *Antifa: The Antifascist Handbook*, former professor Mark Bray writes:

Our goal should be that in twenty years those who voted for Trump are too uncomfortable to share that fact in public. We may not always be able to change someone’s beliefs, but we sure as hell can make it politically, socially, economically, and sometimes physically costly to articulate them.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, for Antifa, the “far right” consists of about sixty-three million adult Americans, and it intends to make it “physically costly” for those citizens to engage in legitimate political speech or assembly. This demonstrates a strategic approach to terrorize American citizens from exercising their constitutional rights.

When working with groups outside of its network, Antifa sometimes requires allies to agree to what is essentially a memorandum of understanding (MOU).<sup>23</sup> These MOUs will typically compel other organizations and protest organizers to accept Antifa’s “community defense” or “protection” in exchange for agreeing not to publicly criticize illegal or violent tactics or inform on Antifa to the police.

Antifa can thus be viewed as a kind of political protection racket that requires allies to subjugate themselves while joining forces intimidate and terrorize their common opponents.

In some cases, protestors may be asked to participate in Antifa-organized “self-defense” training prior to an event. According to

sources who have attended these trainings, this training can include “anti-kidnapping” techniques designed to condition protestors to prevent Antifa members from being arrested by police during demonstrations. This technique manipulates the outer soft core to insulate the seasoned hard core from police action.

In other words, law enforcement cannot assume that Antifa is operating within a given protest or demonstration contrary to the wishes of the protest organizers. Police cannot presume that naïve or unseasoned protestors will not defend violent professional agitators in their midst from arrest. Law enforcement officers dealing with recent violent protests have said—and videos on social media have shown—the organized presence of protestors forming “human shield” or “screen” tactics for armed rioters. This protection tactic has greatly complicated police efforts. Individuals who engage in these tactics need to be understood not as innocent protestors caught up in someone else’s violence, but as accessories to violent extremism.

That said, the presence of Antifa—whose violent activities lead to previously “peaceful protests” being declared riots—violates the free speech rights of other protestors who attend an event or demonstrations and were unaware of, did not intend to participate in, and often objected to, planned violence.

Antifa makes a special point of cooperating and participating with Black Lives Matter (BLM), and so its presence in the recent violent protests is logical and expected. Cooperation with BLM is explicitly mentioned in the “forming an Antifa group” manual produced by *It’s Going Down*, although it warns against tactics that draw “police repression” to BLM and similar groups.<sup>24</sup> This is noteworthy because it highlights that Antifa clearly understands that its criminal behavior can prevent the public expression of other participants, and understands the “optics” its violence can have on such events.

## MATERIAL SUPPORT

Terrorism is a particularly low-cost form of warfare. The entire 9/11 plot is estimated to have cost less than half a million dollars. Even by al Qaeda standards, Antifa operations are extremely cost-efficient. Most members are expected to provide their own materials such as gas masks, shields, helmets, firearms, or various weapons to assault opposing demonstrators or police. Even the use of lasers, fireworks, corrosives, Molotov cocktails and other improvised explosives are low-cost. A Molotov cocktail costs less than 25 cents to make. Locations for hosting armed and unarmed operational training, and those training themselves, are typically provided by Antifa supporting organizations or individuals at no or low cost. Individual Antifa chapters frequently raise funds through event and concert admission fees, cash donations, at anarchist book fairs—where they sell stickers, anarchist books, Antifa flags, shirts, and other merchandise. Antifa members even make lists of supplies on Amazon.com to make it easy for participants to equip themselves at their own expense.

Antifa chapters often make use of internet-based crowdfunding technology, such as Rally.org, or Fundrazer.com. The International Antifa Defense Fund has so far raised \$53,766 via Fundrazer.com.<sup>25</sup> Rose City Antifa, one of the oldest and most notorious Antifa chapters in the Torch Antifa network, raised more than \$24,000 using Rally.org.<sup>26</sup> Some companies like Fundrazer or Rally are used by Antifa groups but are generally content-neutral, though it should be noted that no crowdfunding company has de-platformed Antifa supporters in the way they have de-platformed groups that Antifa or others have targeted. Other crowdfunding websites, such as the Danish Firefund.net, are explicitly ideological in orientation, and only facilitate Antifa and similar fundraising projects.<sup>27</sup>

Operational propaganda support is provided by a number of Antifa-affiliated websites and organizations, including It's Going Down, CrimethInc, Three-Way Fight, and Unicorn Riot. These



websites, often misreported as being “media,” provide organizational assistance, information on tactics techniques and procedures, and other assistance to Antifa participants. Rose City Antifa is one of the largest “contributing authors” of It’s Going Down, for example, where it has published promotions of attacks on journalists and others.<sup>28</sup> Individuals who participated in the siege against the Minneapolis 3<sup>rd</sup> Police Precinct published a long analysis on CrimethInc that can best be described as an “after action report” of the attack.<sup>29</sup>

In 2019 Antifa member Willem Van Spronsen, of the Puget Sound John Brown Gun Club, was killed when he attacked an Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility with Molotov cocktails and small arms fire. Supporters hailed him as a martyr. The websites CrimethInc and It’s Going Down published his final statement, in both audio and text formats.<sup>30</sup>

These and other sites closely compare in function to al Qaeda’s *Inspire* or Islamic State’s *Dabiq* propaganda outlets—sites that, when launched, generated media attention in the US for their “sophistication” in organizing and inciting individual acts of violent extremism outside any command and control. These sites exist not just to report on the network’s activities, but to provide instruction on operations that motivated violent extremists can conduct on their own.

Many Antifa chapters take advantage of Riseup.net for communications. Rise Up is a Seattle-based technology collective that runs secure email servers, listservs, a virtual private network, online collaborative work tools often utilized by Antifa groups, although it is not exclusively dedicated to Antifa activities. Riseup.net is incorporated as a Washington state nonprofit and is registered with the Internal Revenue Service as 501c4 “social welfare” organization.<sup>31</sup>

Major expenses such as transportation, bail and legal support are often provided by support organizations such as Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the International Workers of the World (IWW), the National Lawyers Guild (NLG), and Refuse Fascism, or by the organizers of the protest or demonstrations in which Antifa

participates. Antifa operations may have received funding from wealthy individuals and foundations, either directly or through cutouts.

With proper tasking and oversight, the intelligence community should be able to determine the extent of hostile foreign intelligence service direction or support. It is therefore important to understand the sources of funding of these domestic violent extremist movements and realize that these funders make up a crucial element of infrastructure that enables and encourages Antifa to engage in its terrorist behavior.

Some funders may take advantage of the “fiscal sponsorship” arrangement within state and federal non-profit tax codes to make identifying the eventual source of funds confusing. The following example may be illustrative.

The Antifa support organization Refuse Fascism is a front for the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). The RCP is an overtly Maoist fringe organization, which like the Weather Underground was a splinter group from the original Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the 1970s and led by Robert Avakian, who now lives in France as the RCP Central Committee’s “Chairman-in-Exile.” Avakian’s followers call him their “Precious Leader.” RCP’s strategic objective is to overthrow the Constitution of the United States and replace it with a Marxist-Leninist regime inspired by revolutionary Chinese Maoism. In Avakian’s words,

“If it is true that the greatest contribution to the world revolution that can be made in the U.S. in this period is the overthrow of U.S. imperialism and the establishment of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat in its place, it is certainly no less true that the course of the revolutionary movement in the U.S. and even its prospects for victory will be decisively influenced by the overall course of the revolutionary struggle in the world as a whole.”

As RCP Chairman in Exile, Avakian wrote a 91-page *Constitution of the New Socialist Republic in North America*, which the RCP officially adopted published as a “draft” proposal in 2010. Excerpts of the

“constitution” explain the goal to overthrow the United States Constitution by force, through exploiting extreme societal crisis (such as today’s coronavirus pandemic):

In order to bring this new socialist state into being, it would be necessary to thoroughly defeat, dismantle and abolish the capitalist-imperialist state of the USA; and this in turn would only become possible with the development of a profound and acute crisis in society and the emergence of a revolutionary people, in the millions and millions, who have the leadership of a revolutionary communist vanguard and are conscious of the need for revolutionary change and determined to fight for it. (p. i)

The New Socialist Republic in North America is, like all states, a form of dictatorship—the dictatorship of the proletariat. . . (p. 3)

Refuse Fascism, the modern-day RCP front, openly declares its objective as “removing” the President and Vice-President from office through mass protest, and because of that political position is often misinterpreted as a legal “progressive” group. Attacking and murdering police officers, and de-funding entire police forces, is part of the RCP constitution’s strategy to “defeat, dismantle, and abolish” the American system. The RCP reportedly played a role in the 1992 Rodney King riots.<sup>32</sup> Later it participated in the events surrounding the Ferguson, Missouri riots that resulted in the assassinations of police officers.<sup>33</sup> The RCP “constitution” specifically names “police, courts, and prisons” as instruments of capitalist oppression that must be destroyed in order to overthrow the United States Constitution and install its own “dictatorship.” (p. 1) Indeed, a reading of the entire document provides a vision and strategic action statement for the Antifa movement today.

RefuseFascism.org’s donation button redirects donors to the Alliance for Global Justice, a Phoenix, Arizona-based organization which acts as the group’s fiscal sponsor. Alliance for Global Justice describes itself as founded by the “Nicaragua Network” an organization devoted to supporting “an armed revolution.”<sup>34</sup> The Nicaragua Network was founded as a U.S.-based “solidarity

committee” under the direction of the Soviet-backed, Marxist-Leninist Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) which took power in 1979. A parallel solidarity committee for the communist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrillas of El Salvador, known as CISPES, is known to have been under Cuban intelligence direction and part of an array of international front organizations vertically integrated into Soviet active measures campaigns against the United States in the 1980s. The Nicaragua Network faced accusations of failing to register as a foreign agent but was never convicted.<sup>35</sup> Some of its American operatives were later found to have been connected with the FARC narcoguerrillas of Colombia.

These connections are important for understanding the origins and development of these elements of Antifa and its broader movement. Many of the 1980s radicals aiding the Sandinistas and FMLN remain active in militant organizing, academia, journalism, and even mainstream American politics. Many became involved in the “sanctuary movement” in the 1980s and the abolition-of-American-borders movement of today. Elements of Antifa’s street violence show improvement of tactics based of the FSLN and FMLN’s urban violence in Central America from before many of today’s rioters were born.

The Revolutionary Communist Party-allied Alliance for Global Justice has received funds from large philanthropic foundations including the Tides Foundation and the Open Society Foundation, among others.<sup>36</sup> According video from an investigative report by the organization Project Veritas, a Refuse Fascism leader admitted to having received funding from Open Society Foundation megadonor George Soros, although the video does not identify that funds were provided for the purpose of supporting Antifa efforts.<sup>37</sup>

It may be easy to view Antifa as not a significant target for law enforcement to utilize financial intelligence, given the extremely low cost of its operations. But if one considers all manner of material support—as that term is understood in the context of federal terror finance legislation—to include media, technical assistance, and logistical support, the Antifa ecosystem widens considerably.

## IS ANTIFA A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION?

On May 31, 2020, the President posted on social media his intention to see the Antifa designated as a terrorist organization.<sup>38</sup> It has been reported that members of the Senate Judiciary Committee have made a similar recommendation.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation would currently classify Antifa members as “anarchist extremists” in the context of countering violent extremism/domestic terrorism. Unfortunately, as far as my research has determined, the FBI’s analytical understanding of anarchist extremists and Antifa is substantially lacking, despite the fact that anarchist violence was one of the primary initiating factors for the founding of the FBI more than a century ago.

A search of the FBI’s public website returns exactly one response for “Antifa.” That reference is contained in a June 4, 2020, statement by Director Chris Wray: “We’re seeing people who are exploiting this situation to pursue violent, extremist agendas—anarchists like Antifa and other agitators. These individuals have set out to sow discord and upheaval, rather than join in the righteous pursuit of equality and justice.”<sup>39</sup>

The director’s recognition of Antifa opens the way to further discussion and action, but also reflects a misunderstanding of Antifa operating as “individuals” rather than as a horizontally organized network with a developed internal structure and shared ideology.

The FBI’s 2010 “domestic terrorism primer” on anarchist extremism notes that “much of the criminal activities of anarchist extremists fall under local jurisdiction, so they’re investigated by local police.”<sup>40</sup>

This inaccurate, uninformed view appears to have been institutionalized within the FBI. It does not seem to address—and indeed avoids—the Bureau’s legal responsibility to investigate interstate subversive threats to the Constitution and to enforce the internal security provisions of U.S. federal law, which are directly applicable to Antifa. This myopic, artificial view has allowed Antifa

violence to run rampant in cities and states where local and state political conditions have discouraged the enforcement of the state law against Antifa offenders.

Director Wray's public reference to Antifa is an encouraging development but more needs to be done.

As we did after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and for which then-director Robert Mueller formally recognized members of our organization for their support, we at the Center for Security Policy will be pleased to assist the FBI to improve its analytical approach.

The Federal government's criminal definition of terrorism, either domestic or international requires:

“violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State, or that would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the United States or of any State;

(B) appear to be intended—

(i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population;

(ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or

(iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and assassination.<sup>41</sup>

Antifa's violent attacks against demonstrators, political rally participants, and journalists with the explicit purpose of intimidating and coercing them are clearly terrorism under this definition. While the federal government to my knowledge has yet to charge any Antifa members or adherents with terrorism offenses for their violent behavior, the State of Oklahoma recently charged three individuals under state terrorism statutes following a violent riot in which an Antifa flag was displayed.<sup>42</sup>

## UNMASKING ANTIFA: FIVE PERSPECTIVES ON A GROWING THREAT

The Center for Security Policy is currently working with state legislators to develop state terrorism statutes where they do not exist, and to improve statutes where they do exist, to provide state law enforcement increased tools to respond to Antifa and other extremist threats.

Because anarchist extremism is locked inside an analytical silo as “domestic terrorism,” Antifa’s international links and ideological commitment to overthrow the Constitution of the United States go unexplored. Antifa institutionally encourages and inspires attacks, provides training and instruction on how to organize and conduct attacks, and afterwards provides medical, legal, and financial support, including in some cases from funding received from overseas, and yet no investigations or arrests into the Antifa network have taken place. Instead, individual members and adherents are arrested, bailed out immediately, and then return to wage more violence. Foreign Antifa members or adherents are granted visas to enter and reside in the United States. Lack of card-carrying membership in Antifa does not preclude federal authorities from regarding any Antifa participant as a “member.”

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, federal law enforcement has a responsibility to investigate the role of Antifa in violating the civil rights of American citizens, both those whom Antifa assaults, as well as the rights of those seeking to assemble and petition their government peacefully. The ultimate goal of Antifa’s elder sponsors, its leaders, its members, and its adherents is to overthrow the United States Constitution through violence.

## CONCLUSION

The federal government has a fundamental responsibility to protect the civil rights of all its citizens, and paramount among these rights are the freedom of assembly and the freedom of speech.

Using violence to enforce a political orthodoxy and terrorize into silence those with whom they disagree makes Antifa a growing threat

to fabric of the American way of life and the inalienable rights of all citizens enshrined by our Constitution. Antifa and its support movement have grown increasingly bold over the past forty years. Novice and fanatical bombers and cop-killers from the 1970s have matured into a hardened cadre of veteran professionals who, with two follow-on generations of supporters, have penetrated our institutions of learning, law, politics, journalism, and culture. Their ideological extremism against our Constitution has penetrated the mainstream.

Their violent networks now operate with near immunity in a growing number of cities across the country. As part of their strategy to destroy the Constitution, they incite others to target federal law enforcement and even lay siege to a federal courthouse for days on end, while their not-yet-violent supporters seek to de-fund our police forces and more. Neither the FBI nor the Department of Homeland Security have given any indication that they have prioritized intelligence collection and analysis of this growing domestic terrorist threat. It is clear that the threat has been underestimated and swept under the rug for too long.

All federal officials have sworn an oath that they "will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic." Such an oath is required in Article VI of the Constitution and a matter of law in 5 U.S.C. 331. It was later applied to all federal officials.

It is a requirement of every elected, appointed, or career federal official who took that oath, in every department and agency, to live by it. "Domestic" enemies, according to the legislative history of the law, applied to those engaged in open rebellion or insurrection against the United States.

Everyone in the Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security have an especially profound obligation to live by that oath. That Antifa's unique structure is too "disorganized" to understand, or that Antifa claims to be "anti-fascist" or "anti-racist" is



not an acceptable reason for governments—federal, state or local, to tolerate Antifa’s private street war to overthrow the Constitution.

Just like their predecessors in the Weather Underground and Red Army Faction, Antifa will continue to escalate its behavior unless it is checked. There will be more attacks, and attacks and violent rioting techniques will continue to grow in capability and sophistication. Their cadres and followers will grow. They will align with other disaffected forces, as they have done already. There will be more autonomous zones, and they will remain in place for increasing periods of time.<sup>43</sup> And more Americans, of all political persuasions, will be terrorized.



# Not an Organization, but a Movement

By Gabriel Nadales

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**W**earing the black mask was surreal. When I wore it, I did not think much of it. I merely wanted to act against bias and injustice. When I finally left the movement, I planned to leave it in the past. In fact, I kept it a secret for several years while I rose through the ranks in conservative activism. When I saw Antifa activity spread in 2017, I wrote an op-ed warning people of its dangers. Nevertheless, I planned to continue with my life as if wearing the black mask never happened.

Yet one cannot run from their past. No matter how hard I wish I had not, I did some illegal things. I never hurt a person, but I violated the rights and peace of many. Ultimately, the best way to atone for my mistakes is to use my knowledge of the movement to help put a stop to Antifa's violent ideology. If I can help others to understand Antifa's organization, ideology, leadership, recruitment, and funding and work to dispel myths and misconceptions about the movement, perhaps the time I spent behind the mask may serve some good purpose. Providing an insider look into the ideology of antifascist activists may help law enforcement and policymakers better understand how to address this threat.

## ORGANIZATION

To understand this modern-day threat, one must view Antifa as a movement made up of several people, not a single traditional organization. Antifa is more easily understood not as a noun but as an adjective and a verb.

I boggle the minds of students on college campuses when I tell them, "Antifa is not an organization." After a brief pause, I break the silence with the following: "It is, therefore, weird for me to stand

before you and claim to be a ‘former member’ of Antifa because one cannot be a member in an organization that does not exist.”

But as odd as it is, I am a former Antifa member and participant of the movement, so I can easily see through the falsehoods repeated by news outlets in almost every story involving Antifa. Antifa appears to be mysterious because the mainstream media simply does not know what to make of it. To understand its esoteric nature, one must ignore the false narratives that either paint Antifa as a traditional organization or attempt to claim it does not exist at all.

Antifa is open about not being a traditional organization. Yet some early news reports and interviews about Antifa often lead one to believe it is a well-organized, well-funded operation. This is especially true when the media incorrectly reports that anyone who covers their face with a black mask at rallies belongs to Antifa. Additionally, some interviews with “current” members of “Rose City Antifa” give the false appearance that Antifa has spokespeople.<sup>44</sup> Such a notion is illogical. If Antifa is not an organization, it cannot have spokespeople. Conversely, I find it extremely unlikely that Rose City Antifa’s “members” collectively agreed to conduct an interview with NBC. It is more probable that a few lone activists decided, individually, to speak out. Antifa’s lack of organization leaves the media grasping at straws to decipher the cryptic movement, and interviews with “current members of Antifa” only confuse Americans.

Antifa as an adjective describes various radical left-wing organizations and independent activists within a movement who self-describe their activism as “antifascist.” For example, the “Redneck Revolt” is a far-left organization that is closely associated with Antifa. Yet it does not call itself “Antifa.” Rather, the Redneck Revolt describes its ideology as antifascist.<sup>45</sup> When the media interviews a member or leader of the Redneck Revolt, the one being questioned is speaking solely as to the operations and activism conducted by the Redneck Revolt, and not the movement as a whole.

When I was in the antifascist *movement*, I never joined an organization that called itself “Antifa,” although there are

organizations within the movement that do use the name. I did, however, belong to pro-earth, pro-animal rights, and antiwar collectives throughout Los Angeles and the Inland Empire area. A collective is a more traditional organization with stated goals to promote specific ideologies but which uses a horizontal leadership structure. No one is above anyone, but they do have meetings in which they organize events with other collectives. Certain collectives advocate animal rights, anticapitalism, pro-anarchism, or the like, but eventually, they hide behind the banner of Antifa to conduct more radical activism. These collectives are friendly to the Antifa ideology, which I will describe later.

The immediate circles in which I involved myself were not the most radical, but they did allow me the opportunity to meet people from other, more radical, collectives such as the Animal Liberation Front and Anti-Racist Action. This is because just as organizations within the conservative movement are friendly to one another, so too are organizations within the antifascist movement.

I was involved in Antifa even before beginning my college career. However, I knew college-based organizations played an important role in the movement. In my community, there was the self-identified antifascist organization Direct Action Claremont (D.A.C.), which was largely made up of leftist students from the Claremont Colleges. The D.A.C. collective was present at both the Claremont and Pomona anti-neo-Nazi rallies I attended in 2011. There are many antifascist organizations both on college campuses and in society that, like the D.A.C., disguise themselves as legitimate liberal groups.

These groups organize under different banners. On campus, Antifa-friendly groups work under the banners of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, or the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). Sometimes, college antifascist groups are not national, but localized, operations. One prominent example is By Any Means Necessary—which was established in the 1990s and, most recently, organized the 2017 riot

outside UC Berkeley.<sup>46</sup> Such college organizations play a prominent role in Antifa's structure.

Outside the halls of higher education, Antifa-friendly groups can be found within worker unions or other collectives. Some notable examples are the American Black Cross and the International Workers of the World or other labor unions. These organizations allow Antifa to organize under the guise of legitimate protected speech.

This is not an exhaustive list. There are many left-wing college and noncollege organizations that provide cover for antifascist activism. Not every radical left-wing organization that is friendly to Antifa can really be considered Antifa itself, however. One must remember there are two parts to Antifa. First, it is the adjective, which applies to a left-wing organization when it embraces the "antifascist ideology." Second, it is the verb, which includes its willingness to promote those ideas with violence.

The "verb" is what separates the protected and unprotected type of Antifa-affiliated organizations. Thanks to the First Amendment, even egregious forms of speech (such as those spouted by Nazis—and by Antifa) are protected. However, overtly acting to implement a violent ideology is not protected speech. You are not truly a part of the Antifa movement unless you take that violent step toward "fighting fascism."

For example, DSA certainly aligns itself ideologically with Antifa values. Not every DSA chapter takes its activism from peaceful methods outside First Amendment protection such as attacks, harassment, and defamation. But clearly, some DSA members are engaged in more than just moral support. Another former "Antifa member" told me that many DSA chapters around the country routinely wear the black mask and engage in Antifa tactics. Her local DSA chapter kicked her out for asking too many questions about their activities, but not before she too wore the mask.

The call to action may come from a group or individuals. The most common example occurs when a left-wing group organizes a protest. Many groups and collectives will come out in support, including those

adopting the black mask. But there will also be individuals who are not affiliated with any radical organization but participate in the “black bloc”—the stereotypical Antifa tactic in which dozens of people dressed in black march together to create anonymity against arrests. Going deeper, there are many individual leftist professors who, while not in a radical left-wing group, share Antifa’s ideology and use their place of authority to intimidate students they consider to be “fascist.”

Then there is “mass line” organizing. The mass line is a form of organizing in which trained left-wing radicals infiltrate regular interest groups and “organize mass movements to create more favorable conditions for socialist revolution.”<sup>47</sup> For example, Black Lives Matter presents itself as a movement concerned with the well-being of African Americans. However, that is a façade used to gain support. In reality, the leaders of BLM are trained Marxists who infiltrated an honest movement to use the established momentum to push their left-wing political agenda.<sup>48</sup> The ultimate goal of Antifa-affiliated groups is to establish a society that is more accepting of Antifa-type activism so, ultimately, a socialist revolution may be easier to establish.

In the end, Antifa is an open-admissions movement. Any group or individual can be part of the network if they accept two ethe. First, one must embrace Antifa’s violent ideology. And second, one must be willing to use whatever means available to put the ideology into action.

## IDEOLOGY

Antifa does not stand for anything; it is instead defined by what it stands against. Antifa stands against anything that its adherents choose to define as “fascist.” Antifa uses the word *fascism* as a one-size-fits-all adjective for people and ideas it does not like. The idea modern Antifa believes to be the epitome of fascism is capitalism.

The word *fascism* has not had real meaning for decades. In 1944, George Orwell wrote that any contemporary person understood the

word *fascism* to be a synonym for “bully.”<sup>49</sup> Adolf Hitler was still alive and in power when Orwell wrote the piece for the *Tribune* in London, ironically enough, as they were being bombarded by actual fascists. While Hitler’s Nazi Party was a self-identified fascist group, it was already being understood as a derogatory term that could easily be applied to one’s political enemies, regardless of accuracy.

To understand why Antifa is first and foremost anticapitalist, one must first look at the original Antifa group—which, unlike modern Antifa, was in fact a traditionally organized enterprise. As I write in my manuscript titled *Behind the Black Mask*,<sup>50</sup>

The Antifaschistische Aktion (Antifascist Action) is the first “Antifa” group in history. Established in the early 1930s, this group was actually the military wing of the German Communist Party (KPD). Unlike modern Antifa movements, the Antifascist Action was an actual organization. Modern Antifa groups borrow much of Antifascist Action’s imagery and symbolism. The original Antifa logo had two red flags, which were symbols for socialism and communism. Modern Antifa typically has one red and one black flag to symbolize anarcho-collectivism or anarcho-communism. While modern Antifa claims it exists to fight fascism, the original goal of Antifa was to fight for left-wing political power.

Members of the Antifascist Action did not see fascism as an existential threat; they merely saw it as competition. In fact, Nazis were not their primary target in Germany, and they often saw Nazism as a lesser evil when compared with other left-leaning political factions. My theory is that Antifa likely did not target German Nazis because the National Socialist Party was also a self-proclaimed socialist movement; thus, to some degree, they also opposed capitalism. As Mark Bray writes,

[T]he socialists and communists were far more preoccupied with each other than they were with the paramilitary formation that would prove to be the most important of them all: the Sturmabteilung (Storm Troops, or SA) of Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist German Workers’ Party.<sup>51</sup>



## UNMASKING ANTIFA: FIVE PERSPECTIVES ON A GROWING THREAT

In turn, the Antifascist Action and KPD fought capitalists because they were the chief rival of the Soviet Union; both groups were funded and essentially directed by Joseph Stalin.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, the KPD also fought social Democrats because the Communists believed that anyone who opposed them was inherently procapitalist and thus “objectively” a fascist.<sup>53</sup>

Like modern Antifa, the German Communist Antifa of the 1930s wrongly equated capitalism with fascism. Even at its roots, Antifa was never about fighting an oppressive ideology. Antifa has always been about fighting to destroy capitalism and establish communism. As an antifascist group in Munich declared in 2018, “The fight against fascism is only won when the capitalist system is smashed and a classless society is established.”<sup>54</sup> In short, Antifa is fighting capitalism, not fascism. But as any radical communist will tell you, they are the same thing. Fortunately, other governments treat the Antifa movements more seriously than we have in America—at least until very recently.

This anticapitalism movement masquerading as antifascism soon took to the world stage in the late 1930s. According to historian Norman Davies, the rapid rise of fascism in Italy and Germany worried world leaders. The first to act was Joseph Stalin. He ordered Maxim Litvinov, his foreign commissioner, to join the League of Nations and work to fight against fascism. Thus, the Soviet Union began disseminating the “antifascism” ideology. As Davies writes, “Needless to say, ‘anti-Fascism’ did not offer a coherent political ideology. In terms of ideas, it was an empty vessel, a mere political dance. It showed its adherents what to oppose, not what to believe in.”<sup>55</sup>

Stalin was right. Fascism is a dangerous ideology that should be challenged. But he fought fascism to promote communism, an equally oppressive form of government. Davies continues, “[O]nly in the background was the unspoken dialectic that, if Fascism was to be Bad, the Good had to lie with the originator of anti-Fascism—Joseph Stalin’s USSR.”<sup>56</sup>

Antifa’s mission is to fight fascists, and anyone who isn’t a radical leftist is a fascist. While modern Antifa has no direct lineage to the

1930s movement, it shares the same traits, philosophy, and tactics. It is comparable to modern neo-Nazis, who are not the same as the early 20th-century German party that carried out the Holocaust yet promote the same violent ideology as their predecessors.

## LEADERSHIP

Antifa is not a traditional organization. While there is no governing board, president, secretary, director, official spokesperson, or anyone who acts in any “official” capacity, there is leadership. Antifa’s leadership can be broken into three different fronts. First, there are national thought leaders who profess Antifa’s ideology. Second, there are regional leaders who organize large protests. And lastly, there are independent leaders who organize locally. These three types of leaders do not always join forces, but they are often working concurrently in their mission to “fight fascism.”

On the national stage, thought leaders encompass authors of national prominence as well as some elected officials. One of the most widely known national figures is author Mark Bray, ever since he wrote the book *Antifa: The Antifascist Handbook*. Before becoming a national voice for Antifa, he was more appropriately categorized as a regional leader. However, his book, largely written due to his regional connections, gave him a prominent voice. Mark Bray’s book is significant because it gives left-wing radicals a manifesto on Antifa’s ethos that can be used to recruit more Antifa activists. Additionally, his book was read by various elected officials, including former U.S. Representative and former Vice Chairman of the Democratic Party Keith Ellison.<sup>57</sup> Not long after, Rep. Ellison deleted his tweet, but the damage was already done. Rep. Ellison gave positive exposure to Antifa’s violent ideology, which contributes to Antifa’s legitimacy.

However, Rep. Ellison is not alone. In 2019, Antifa activists attacked demonstrators at a rally, and the police arrested several left-wing radicals.<sup>58</sup> Some of these activists faced several counts of assault and battery. In response to the attacks, Congresswomen Alexandria

Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley fundraised to bail the attackers out of jail.<sup>59</sup> The unmatched moral support that Antifa receives from these elected officials has helped Antifa grow from an obscure movement to national prominence.

In the regional state, there are activists who are leaders of their left-wing organizations. For example, in the California Bay Area, there is Yvette Felarca. Felarca is affiliated with By Any Means Necessary and has been arrested multiple times for assault, battery, and rioting-related charges.<sup>60</sup> In one incident, she attempted to intimidate the president of UC Berkeley College Republicans by filing a frivolous restraining order against him. A Leadership Institute field representative present when she served the order told me Yvette attempted to personally hand the order but was told that intentionally walking close to him would reveal she was not fearful of the student. Thus, she elected to throw it at his feet. Unfortunately for her, she was ordered to pay \$10,000 of legal fees in restitution for her harassing behavior.<sup>61</sup> Yvette Felarca may be just one local middle-school teacher, but her willingness to use all legal and physical means at her disposal helped her create a sphere of influence in her region.

I encountered Yvette Felarca twice while working for the Leadership Institute. The first incident occurred in 2017 when the same field representative and I infiltrated a leftist march from Oakland to Berkeley, California. We attended the demonstration because we believed they would start violence against conservatives, and we wanted to record video evidence. Unfortunately, Yvette recognized my field representative and began to shout at us. She sped toward us, singling us out and calling people toward our location, in what appeared to be an attempt to instigate an altercation. I decided to leave immediately because we knew what would happen if we remained.

The second time I saw Yvette was later that same year when she initiated the same kind of swarming action against another person she disliked. Fortunately, for everyone else involved, she was arrested before further violence ensued. Yvette is an unapologetic antifascist

activist who uses her reputation to lead and inspire others to commit similar criminal acts.

When I was in the movement, I remember meeting several regional leaders akin to Yvette Felarca. For example, Jang Lee is the vocalist of the anarcho-punk/animal rights band Resist and Exist. The band is quite famous within punk circles around the country, so he may be categorized as a national thought leader. While most active in the 1990s, I remember him from the 2010s—when he organized various anarchist bookfairs throughout Southern California, several of which I attended. At these events, I met other regional leaders who invited me to attend animal rights protests or pro-earth demonstrations. This is how regional leaders often meet with other people who are yet to be politically active. For example, in *Antifa: The Antifascist Handbook*, Bray describes that he was able to interview radical activists only because he had a history of regional organizing with movements such as the Occupy protests, which were international, mostly left-wing protests around the world.<sup>62</sup> In other words, he put in the grunt work to prove himself as a legitimate left-wing advocate to gain the trust of other leftist activists.

Another example of a regional leader can be found in North Carolina, disguised as an educator. Dwayne Dixon is a professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and he is the leader of his chapter of the Redneck Revolt.<sup>63</sup> According to some reports, Dixon uses his position as a professor to pedal his brand of left-wing radical politics.

Unfortunately, Dixon is only one of many professors who push violent antifascist politics. After independent journalist and Antifa critic Andy Ngo was beaten by Antifa activists in Portland, Oregon, Professor Stanislav Vysotsky, from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater wrote an op-ed justifying the attack, calling it a form of self-defense.<sup>64</sup> Countless professors pedal this type of misinformation to students and, sometimes, engage in Antifa's tactics. Therefore, these professors can be considered regional influencers or leaders within the antifascist movement.

Furthermore, regional organizers sometimes establish apparently legitimate businesses that become a center for radical organizing. Left-wing bookstores, clothing establishments, and record shops frequently play a key role in organizing radicals. At the very least, these establishments provide left-wing radicals a place to meet other activists in their region. Take as an example Revolution Books, which is mere steps away from UC Berkeley in California. At first glance, the shop is merely another bookstore with a peculiar interest in selling left-wing radical paraphernalia. However, a closer look reveals that the establishment played a predominant role in several Antifa rallies in the area. In one instance, I witnessed employees (or volunteers) of the bookstore arranging a speaker system to participate in the same protest in which Yvette Felarca was arrested. Their speaker system was later confiscated by the police when their protest was declared a breach of the peace. When not helping to provide material support to violent protests, Revolution Books organizes meet-up events for left-wing radical speakers to spread their anti-American viewpoints. These meet-ups appear analogous to many workshops I personally attended at different anarchist bookfairs. These miniconferences are essential to left-wing radical organizing.

Another example of an apparently legitimate establishment comes from the University of California, San Diego. In October 2017, liberty-minded students from the university were engaged in a peaceful free speech project—a giant 12-foot-tall beach ball that student advocates asked their peers to sign in support of free speech. This activism project was a fantastic and simple way to get more liberty-minded students engaged. Yet due to its popularity and effectiveness, many left-wing radical students sought to vandalize the ball, and one communist student slashed it with a sharp object. The vandal gained access to the free-speech ball using a pseudonym that referenced Groundwork Books, a nearby left-wing bookstore.<sup>65</sup> Once the students realized what happened, they decided to track down the

bookstore and found the vandal hiding inside. He was caught within a few minutes by campus police.

The last class of Antifa leadership comprises individuals who organize protests at the local level. These local organizers should be differentiated from those who merely attend protests or engage in political violence. During my time in Antifa activism, I personally invited to protests people who were extremely active during demonstrations. Yet these activists would never lift a finger on their own. While those people can still be a threat, they are by no means leaders.

Independent leaders consist of individuals who *organize* protests at the local level. When I was in the movement, I not only was invited to numerous demonstrations but also played a prominent role in organizing them. In one situation, I worked alongside an individual from Los Angeles to recruit for a protest on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Only 10 people showed up to this specific event. This was early in my radical activist career but shows how the seeds of revolution are planted. Not long after that first small rally, I was responsible for organizing around 20 activists to join thousands of others at a separate larger rally. I also organized people to attend the Occupy movement. These protests, taken in aggregate, had an international impact, but would not have been possible without local independent leaders such as myself.<sup>66</sup>

In the end, there is one similarity between the different types of Antifa leaders: anyone can be a leader in the movement. All one must do is choose to be more engaged in radical circles. After years of being at the forefront of radical politics, left-wing activists grow a sphere of influence around them. The longer one remains in the movement, the higher their reputation grows among other radical activists, and thus, they can become national thought leaders. However, one must remember there is no “official” leadership within the movement. Any of these activists are walking on thin ice. If their tactics or ideology differ from the accepted norm within most antifascist circles, then the “leader” can lose that influence and respect overnight.

## RECRUITMENT

Recruitment can take different forms, including in-person and online recruitment. Personally, I have far more experience with the first than the latter. I was involved in the movement when I was still using Myspace—which, unlike Facebook and Twitter, was not a useful platform to organize.

People often wonder how I was “recruited” into the movement. The reality is that no one ever asked me to be part of anything; I was the one searching for a way to be involved. Long before I wore the black mask, I passed out antiwar flyers at school, marched alongside labor unions, and read up on radical politics. The first time I met someone who considered themselves part of the antifascist movement was in Claremont, California, in 2011. After that event, I met people who invited me to more radical gatherings. However, I likely would have found them eventually. In truth, many left-wing radicals are independently active at first. Among left-wing radicals within the Antifa movement, there is a constant struggle to grow and build the left-wing presence in America. This means constantly growing and establishing new groups and new collectives and adding to the movement.

Flyers and posters are likely not only some of the most common type of political technology but also the most ineffective. Passing out flyers not only costs a lot of money but also takes a long time and often does not yield great results when compared to active soliciting. However, flyers can have a tremendous effect when placed in the correct places. Often, pro-Antifa flyers are placed in left-wing establishments such as those discussed earlier. This targeted approach yields much better results than merely posting flyers around college campuses because the people entering these left-wing establishments are already sympathetic to the Antifa cause and, thus, are more likely to become involved. At many venues and collectives I attended, I routinely saw these “recruitment” flyers that advertised the next protest, rally, or call to action. Personally, I passed flyers at

Crust-punk gigs and shows, knowing full well there were likely many people present who were willing to be involved in politics. Thus, while mostly ineffective, targeted flyers can help grow the antifascist movement.

Additionally, there are certain Antifa-affiliated organizations that do have traditional recruitment efforts. The traditional organizational system allows them to designate people dedicated to recruiting more members. This can take a variety of shapes, but I have noticed that the most effective way to recruit people into left-wing radical groups is to not talk about politics. Rather, these recruiters identify others to invite to their community events.

One group that has found much success on college campuses using this method is the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). In the last several years, I have spoken to many members of the SJP at involvement fairs in different colleges by posing as an interested student. Aside from them giving me their usual political pitch, they also encourage me to join an “inclusive community” in which I would “find support” as a person of color. This verbiage entices people who may feel marginalized, but are not political, to join radical groups such as the SJP. It is only after joining the SJP and becoming “part of the community” that one begins the political work. Again, this is another form of mass line organizing. The tactic shifts people’s minds into one of “struggle” against the oppressors. At this point, many members find a type of kinship with other left-wing radical groups who feel “marginalized,” such as fellow socialists, communists, and anarchists. Knowing this, the more radical activists tap into these networks and recruit them to engage in more serious activism demonstrations that fall under the banner of Antifa.

Similarly, labor unions provide cover for antifascist recruitment. Law enforcement is aware of the dynamic between labor groups and radical activism. A friend who was a member of a labor union in the Northern California area told me of a meeting that was a semi-secretive invite-only event. As such, it was advertised only through the word of mouth. At this labor meeting, everyone introduced



themselves and how they heard about it. Finally, two people said they learned of the meeting from a “flyer.” Everyone knew they were lying. Some members pressed the individuals to tell them how they heard about the meet-up, until someone finally said what everyone was thinking: “You guys are cops.” The alleged officers were expelled. It is not easy to “infiltrate” such a meeting because the more radical activists make sure to keep a tight lid on who receives information. Nonetheless, if you spend enough time within radical circles, you may eventually be recruited to a more serious meeting.

One does not get recruited into an organization—Antifa—that technically does not exist. Rather, the recruitment is for other established left-wing organizations that share a type of kinship with the Antifa movement. It is important to understand that these organizations are the real infrastructure for antifascist activists.

## ONLINE ACTIVISM

The digital world does provide a more efficient and expedient system to connect with others around the world, although when it comes to radical activism, social media has its challenges. When I first joined the antifascist movement, I did not have Facebook or Twitter. Both tools—along with Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, and many others—have become essential for grassroots activism. Now, as a conservative, I frequently utilize all these platforms to promote different causes.

However, Antifa groups are a dime-a-dozen on social media. Doing a quick google search, one may encounter several Antifa accounts online. These accounts disseminate information about local events or calls to actions or simply spread information about their worldview. Some Antifa social media accounts are better than others, but, in the end, anyone who has any experience with social media will know the struggles these accounts face. Given the inherent lack of structure within Antifa organizing, it’s reasonable to believe that these Antifa social media accounts are managed by one or two

individuals who are “plugged-in” to the movement but are not necessarily representative. Well-run social media pages can give the appearance of influence, even in places where there is no active Antifa presence on the ground. When attempting to analyze the likely strength of Antifa organizing in a given area, one should put more weight into the presence of other active radical left-wing groups than on the presence of an online “Antifa chapter.” It’s worth being skeptical of those who claim to be “part of Antifa,” as the majority of hard-core activists organize under their own collectives and rarely work under the banner of Antifa. Nonetheless, there are some examples in which some Antifa accounts appear to represent more than just one or a few people. These accounts may eventually backfire on this left-wing movement, given the ease with which such accounts can be tracked.

Fortunately, this presents an opportunity for conservatives and law enforcement. At Berkeley in 2017, there was a left-wing activist who attacked a conservative while he filmed himself and uploaded it on Twitter. As the victim’s attorney told me, while his handle was public, the identity of the perpetrator was unknown. However, using tracking technology, the attorneys were able to establish the attacker’s identity and hold him accountable. That litigation is ongoing. There are many other examples of Antifa accounts posting information that eventually backfires, and that is a good thing for law-abiding citizens.

## FUNDING

I often get asked, “Who paid you?” Well, no one paid me, and that reveals a troubling truth. There are many people who are not motivated by money willing to violate the rights of their fellow citizens. Indeed, this is more worrisome than if they were motivated by money since then presumably one could pay them to engage in more worthwhile endeavors.

That said, many of the left-wing groups that form the backbone of Antifa organizing do receive official funding. Most of that funding appears to be through legitimate means, and information about it is often publicly available. One should not make the mistake, however, of believing money donated to these groups leads to control over them. Money received is collateral to their activities and is seen as simply a means to allow them to work toward their expressed goal. There are also some rare circumstances in which groups do receive funding expressly for Antifa activities. For example, Mark Bray pledged to give half the proceeds of his book to a legal fund dedicated to paying for legal representation for Antifa activists, as well as other necessities.<sup>67</sup>

## CONCLUSION

So much of the world misunderstands Antifa. Antifa is not a mere organization, it is a movement and, therefore, encompasses several different left-wing radical groups. These seemingly legitimate groups provide cover for Antifa activism. Their true ideology is to fight capitalism and the American way of life—not fascism. The name entices and misleads well-meaning people into supporting them. Left-wing radicals claim Antifa fights oppressive ideas when, in truth, Antifa is the oppressive movement. While Antifa does not have any official structure, specific influential individuals can be considered leaders within the movement. Lastly, recruitment comes through already established left-wing organizations with official funding, which acts as a form of “vetting” to ensure that potential Antifa activists are truly committed.

This oppressive movement has now become a national problem in part because many left-wing politicians think Antifa is working for them. Yet antifascist activists are radicals who are not interested in the back and forth of modern peaceful debate between parties. Unless all Americans utterly reject the antifascist movement, it will only continue to grow in prominence and become more radical.

When I became part of the Antifascist movement, I thought I was doing good. I now understand that Antifa is a self-righteous movement that is fighting not against fascism but to achieve political power.

# The Tactics of Antifa

By Erin Smith

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“Tactics are each of the movements that are carried out within a strategic framework to achieve positions of intermediate advantage that bring us closer to a partial or final strategic objective.”

— Lusbert; *Strategy and Tactics for a Revolutionary Anarchism* (2020)<sup>68</sup>

In the wake of George Floyd’s death, almost every American city of note writhed in the grip of mass civil unrest. A seemingly endless procession of street mobs was livestreamed demolishing downtown areas for the online digital enjoyment of the mobs’ global supporters. Digital sparks fanned by the media created burning embers that fell on the dried tinder of ennui and poverty created by mismanaged and disruptive pandemic responses. This combustible combination set the nation alight. The circumstances of Floyd’s death are beyond the scope of this piece. Our focus is the actors driving a particular subset of the most violent responses.

Amateur videos livestreamed from some of the worst-hit areas show flashes of activity: black-clad figures move in the background with a purpose—bolt cutters are pulled from backpacks, bike racks stacked and chained as improvised barricades, windows smashed, and anarchist slogans spray-painted with near military precision. Improvised explosives were lobbed into police lines.

These are sights and sounds that many Americans have become all too familiar with. The actions of a nebulous group identified as “Antifa.”

While their roots are far older, Antifa came to the attention of most Americans after the February 1, 2017, assault on the UC Berkeley campus that disrupted a scheduled appearance by Milo

Yiannopoulos. Multiple clashes between the “black blocs” of Antifa and Trump supporters followed throughout the spring and summer of that year.

There is much to be said about these faceless saboteurs both personally and ideologically. But for our purposes, we are interested in exploring not their motives but their methods.

How do they coordinate actions that would have taken prior meetings, practice of tactics, prior surveillance, and plans as detailed as any military small-unit engagement? And most of all, how do cadres of small, highly effective troublemakers operate in the midst of an unprecedented surveillance state specifically set up to capture small groups of organized violent extremists?

Are they terrorists? Partisans?

For the purposes of this chapter, we define Antifa as a transnational, affinity-group-based, open source insurgency network with domestic affiliates predominantly based in the urban cores.

Antifa is transnational because it operates beyond national borders. The affinity group is the smallest tactical unit of Antifa and the unit around which all activities are based. It is open source in the sense that its ranks are open to any and all who share their objectives. Self-defining as “Antifa” is sufficient in a manner not far removed from the way that a jihadist might self-identify as a member of “the Islamic State” without having ever been contacted by a recruiter from that organization. It is an insurgency in that it fundamentally seeks to deny the ability of lawful authorities to govern in their own territory and replace lawful authority with that of its own design. As transportation hubs and centers of economic and cultural gravity, cities provide key advantages to the side that can demonstrate undisputed control. The increasing significance of controlling urban territory has become a mainstay for U.S. military doctrine for this very reason.

In the United States, the information economy has increasingly concentrated governmental, corporate, and cultural influence in a handful of key urban centers. The ability to project targeted pressure in these areas and—just as importantly—deny one’s political

opponents the ability to organize in these areas provides Antifa with a tremendous amount of “soft power.”

Antifa’s objectives can be understood as, first and foremost, raising the marginal costs of opposition (meaning primarily, but not exclusively, right wing or conservative) organizing and activism in urban areas by employing a spectrum of direct and indirect means up to and including carefully calibrated low-intensity violence. As pro-Antifa writer Shane Burley puts it,

Much of Antifa’s tactical set is inspired by “militant antifascism,” which uses direct engagement with fascist groups; opposes “parliamentary antifascism” that seeks to ban far-right groups and parties; and is distinct from “liberal antifascism,” which uses less confrontational movement building.<sup>69</sup>

In other words, Antifa seeks to directly engage with its political opponents, which they label as “fascist groups,” to make their continued presence impossible. They are not interested in winning a political debate or achieving a legislative objective.

Their secondary objective is to provoke disproportionate, high-intensity violence from their opponents, which can then be exploited for propaganda purposes.

## RHETORICAL FRAMING

To achieve real-world dominance, Antifa must first achieve a kind of information battlespace dominance. This is done through a fundamentally dishonest rhetorical tactic, which is illustrated in the Burley excerpt utilized above.

By keeping the meaning of critical terms such as “fascism,” “fascism-adjacent,” “violence,” and “self-defense” purposefully undefined, self-labeled “antifascists” are able to deploy the classic motte-and-bailey rhetorical tactic that makes them hard to pin down.

Antifa supporters deliberately camouflage their own aggressively authoritarian definitions—whereby all opposition to

their activities is considered de facto fascist as the more normal and mainstream understanding of those terms.

This allows them to justify attacks on the mainstream political right and, sometimes, even center-left targets while frustrating critics. Antifa does this with definitional arguments that distract from the fact that it uses violence against peaceful fellow citizens to advance its radical objectives—combined with the political right's often-appalling lack of representation in the media of the urban areas where Antifa operates and receives an almost uncontested ability to cast any right-leaning opposition as literal Nazis.

This, in turn, allows Antifa to control the dialogue of what's considered normal—right wing or left wing—and thus control the policy set by the media, corporations, and other drivers of economic and cultural capital by using these definitions to eliminate competition.

Additionally, by keeping the label “Antifa” as close to a floating signifier as possible, it allows them to adjust the term as needed. When plausible deniability is the goal—when gang or domestic terrorist designations are threatened—then they are “loosely organized.” Yet Antifa membership becomes carefully defined when one of their number is responsible for a public relations disaster where disavowal is needed, as in the cases of 2019 Tacoma, Washington, ICE firebombing perpetrator Willem Van Spronsen or 2019 Dayton, Ohio, mass shooter Connor Betts.

When blame is to be hung on their collective head, they are suddenly a cohesive enough group that the violent actor in question doesn't count as part of the group.

## ANTIFA ORDER OF BATTLE

It is important to understand that despite being heavily anarchist in ideology, Antifa is not without its structures. Indeed, quite the opposite. Tactically, Antifa is organized around the ability to perform



multiple independent and autonomous small-unit operations with anonymity.

The smallest building block of Antifa organizing is the “affinity group.” The concept is simple: a group of politically aligned friends that already socialize, work, and sometimes, even live together decide to form an autonomous, cooperative activist cell so they may better accomplish their mutual objectives. The affinity group model thus creates an effective force built upon a foundation of mutual respect and trust, further cemented by eschewing hierarchy in favor of a collaborative, consensus-based decision-making process.

The affinity group concept provides several advantages that make it extraordinarily effective and resistant to disruption. For starters, the intense ideological motivation and personal connection means members are not as susceptible to offers of payment or material gain as just reasons to betray their comrades. The pre-existing intimate bonds mean a loyalty and solidarity that drives bottom lining (i.e., coming through on commitments to the group no matter what), as well as shared knowledge of personal strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities that better informs chosen security practices and roles.

Consensus decision-making—while sometimes time-consuming—reinforces individual agency, provides everyone a chance to listen and contribute as equals, and ensures no aggrieved minority factions by allowing each person to feel involved as a stakeholder in the final outcome. This also further empowers members to adapt to changing conditions later in the field, allowing initiative and individual flexibility while maintaining awareness and investment in the collective goal.

A single affinity group can be as few as two to as many as a dozen or more individuals, depending on desired objectives and the ability to maintain cohesion and effective decision-making. If more are needed, an affinity group will sometimes collaborate with others in clusters or spokescouncils; less, and the group may temporarily split into smaller sections.

An affinity group is above all a small community of its own embedded within a larger, usually left-leaning one and, like all communities, contains implicit carrot and stick enforcement mechanisms. The group provides a support network for those arrested or injured in the course of their collective ideological pursuits and ostracizes those who repeatedly fail or prove they cannot be trusted. This provides a powerful motivation; it's sometimes hard enough for people to quit their jobs, imagine how much harder it is to quit one's closest friends, one's tribe?

### ***Black Bloc: Tactic or Identity?***

Above the affinity group is the most easily identifiable unit of Antifa organizing, the black bloc. Contrary to common misconception, the black bloc is not an organization in its own right, but rather a tactical formation. A mass of people wearing the same monochromatic uniform to intimidate and frustrate identification.

A bloc is not strictly an Antifa-specific tactic, and technically, any group of private individuals who dress in matching disguises to obscure their identity and gather in coordinated, direct action targeting a specific political objective meets the definition. The online anarchist collective CrimethInc cites the Boston Tea Party as an early, well-known example of successful bloc direct action. As they note,

The whole idea of a Bloc is to look indistinguishable from each other, so make sure whatever your Bloc theme is, everyone is on the same page about it and that your own clothing doesn't bear any features that distinguish it.<sup>70</sup>

Put simply, black blocs are something Antifa *does*, not something Antifa *is*; some Antifa members may very well never pull on a mask or even hit the streets. Antifa truly embraces its ideology of diversity of tactics, and blocs are the most visible, attention-getting, militant tactic employed. However, if the black bloc is a great white shark's fin cutting through the water, there are numerous other deadly bull or

tiger sharks that never show fin before biting, and the black bloc only hints at the full scale of the network and spectrum of tactics employed by Antifa. As Antifa propagandist Mark Bray puts it in his book *Antifa: The Antifascist Handbook*,

The black bloc is not an organization or a specific group. It is a tactic of anonymous, coordinated street militancy used predominantly, though not exclusively, by anarchists and antiauthoritarians that originated in the 1980s among the German Autonomen.”<sup>71</sup>

The most common blocs seen today involve black clothing out of tradition and simplicity and for the intimidation factor, but given that we are dealing with individuals whose politics are anarchist-leaning, it can hardly be said to be the rule. One notable outlier is Pastel Bloc (an LGBTQ+-centered antifascist group), which eschews black in favor of brightly colored and distracting outfits to perform its primary supporting/scouting function in bloc-centric street action.

### **Building Blocs**

There are three types of bloc-organizing models: open, closed, and semi-open.

Open blocs are ones where the recruiting and planning is announced and done openly. However, this model has such limited trust and poor security that the array of tactics that can be usefully employed with it is extremely limited. As a result, this is a fairly rare type of bloc to encounter from Antifa, and the ones that do form are more likely to ditch the black outfits in favor of a relevant theme or costume for the topic of interest and avoid more violent tactics. You are much more likely to see this applied in political theater than aggressive direct action. The uniform is the message, where it serves not as a hiding tactic but as a medium for communicating political propaganda. Announcing members wearing matching t-shirts with a slogan would be a common use for an open bloc; a good example would be the “Mom Bloc” at the ongoing Portland federal courthouse

riots, dressed in yellow shirts and forming a human wall between the demonstrators and the federal agents defending the building.

A closed bloc is one where the planning, organizing, and recruitment are done in strict secrecy and no one else is allowed to join during the action. This has the advantage of the tightest operational security but puts a practical limit on the total number of people that can be turned out for an action. A closed bloc is utilized for targeted sabotage, harassment, vandalism, or other criminal acts—cases where the legal stakes are high and the number of people required low.

A semi-open bloc selects the best elements from both the open and closed models and combines them. By publicly announcing a time and location to meet, it allows for properly dressed outsiders to join in the action—and thus increase the size of the bloc—while restricting the planning and organizing within the strict secrecy culture of the core affinity groups that planned the action. This has the dual benefit of protecting the cell, as everyone can plausibly deny being part of the closed bloc inside, and allowing the closed bloc cover to carry out its activities while the sheer number of participants in a semi-open bloc visually conceals its actions from outsiders.

Blocs are not permanent units but are rather made up of independent affinity groups that come together to perform a specific action. In doing so, each participating affinity group would often either meet in a “cluster” or, if the numbers are too great, select a representative and form a “spokescouncil” for the planning phase. This is also the bloc style most often seen working in coordination with less-militant activist groups at mass protests because the sheer number of bodies can strain security forces and give the bloc more room to complete its objectives. As the axiom goes, “Protests are cover for riots, riots are cover for direct action.”

## **Closed Blocs as Strike Teams**

During counterprotest action where Antifa is seeking to disrupt a preplanned First Amendment-protected rally or demonstration, closed blocs made up of one or more affinity groups may break off from the larger semi-open bloc to intercept and attack individuals and small groups as they move through “transitional spaces” often to or from the event location. Businesses in these areas are often closed, and law enforcement and security forces tend to be drawn inward, focused on the actual event itself. This leaves a donut-shaped space of vulnerability around the event, radiating outward about two to three blocks before “normal” city activity resumes. Much like a predator stalking a grasslands watering hole, Antifa will frequently hunt for its prey in this zone.

This becomes even more effective for Antifa when events and rallies are held in venues with strict security and expansive lists of prohibited weapons and nonlethal defensive tools (such as OC spray) because it ensures potential victims are left at a disadvantage coming and going to the event.

It is also a reflection of how efforts to maintain safety and security can have the opposite effect. It pays to remember that Antifa’s main objective is not mass casualties, but rather raising the costs of activism by its political opponents through low-intensity conflict. It is important for law enforcement and other security agencies to pay especially close attention to routes between the event and neighboring parking facilities that attendees can reasonably be expected to patronize.

When victims are not available, these independent blocs can engage in sabotage and vandalism. With endless graffiti, smashing, and looting and sometimes burning businesses and banks, destroying ATMs, and torching cars, the point is to disrupt the tax base that supports the police and impose an economic cost on the establishment.

Windows, in particular, serve a role as a performative target: smashing them as a way to invert broken window policing,

demonstrating for all to see the intrinsic ungovernability of the populace, and erasing the physical and legal barriers between the public and goods as symbolic propaganda of the deed.

These tactics are a perfect example of the flexible operations and accumulated institutional knowledge that Antifa groups have gained over multiple actions and that are constantly being deployed and improved.

### ***Bloc Roles and the Individual***

Both inside the bloc and outside the bloc in supporting roles, there are a number of important, but informal, divisions of responsibilities that are carried out by different activists. This section will start with support/perimeter elements and work inwards toward the bloc main body.

Remember, Antifa is decentralized and flexible, so don't expect them to march out in tightly regimented formation with a series of easily identifiable ranks:

Some have argued in favor of a more militaristic Bloc model that would presumably operate more like the hierarchical regiments our enemies pit against us, but the very strength of the Bloc is its decentralized, unpredictable nature; it seems foolish to try to beat our oppressors at their own game rather than capitalizing on our own strengths. Better we improve our coordination, rather than control: we are conductors setting the stage for improvisation, not military tacticians with underlings and commanding officers.<sup>72</sup>

**Scouting/Surveillance:** One such responsibility is scouting and surveillance. Antifa associates may be sitting at home or in a vehicle a few blocks away, monitoring police scanners and social media and tweeting pertinent information publicly on Antifa affiliate accounts, as well as sending real-time strategic updates directly to members in the streets. In larger actions, it's quite common for individuals and small groups dressed in street clothes to scout the target location and the route of advance—often riding or carrying skateboards, an

innocuous, yet effective weapon, and communicating with the main body via burner phones using encrypted apps such as Signal, Slack/Telegram chats, or programmable radios.

Radios have some advantages in that they work when cell towers are overloaded and can be used to avoid law enforcement deployment of a “stingray”—an international mobile subscriber identity-catcher device. As such, radios play a critical role in Antifa communications during the faster-moving parts of a street action. Since a decentralized network with distributed decision-making and a large degree of autonomy (even in the bloc) means a fraction of the radio traffic found in a more hierarchal, command-and-control organization, the sparing use of carefully worded voice communications during those moments isn’t so much of an issue.

**Medic:** Moving inward from the perimeter, the next role is that of the medic, which is also one of the most flexible and misunderstood roles. Marked with prominent red crosses and backpacks bulging with first aid gear, medics moving with a bloc are often the only members easily distinguishable from the pack. Medics will frequently associate with one or more of the street medic collectives that coordinate and provide training. It is not unusual for some of them to have EMT and nursing experience.

Medics handle first aid duties, such as the ever-popular flushing of eyes with water or L.A.W. (liquid antacid and water, mixed 50/50) after tear gas and pepper spray exposure.

But they also play another important command-and-control-type function by serving as ersatz “referee,” ensuring violent attacks don’t get out of hand and permanently maim or kill their victims. While medics rarely engage in direct violence themselves, they can be spotted tagging along behind the more aggressive affinity groups and rotating through the hottest parts of the action, keeping an eye out for any in-progress beatdown that’s getting just a *little* too one-sided. In this way, medics play an important role in ensuring Antifa’s primary objectives are accomplished, raising the cost of political participation and physically hurting and demoralizing opponents but avoiding

deaths or highly photogenic injuries or atrocities that would work against them for propaganda purposes. Medics keep Antifa's violence within the constrained window, which is an essential part of Antifa's mission.

**Cover Bloc:** The individuals that show up properly attired in black and join a semi-open bloc as reinforcements—that is, those who are not members of an involved affinity group—may not be privy to any of the internal planning or be fully committed to taking part in violence themselves. They still serve a useful function just by showing up, swelling the numbers, and providing fungible bodies to overwhelm and distract security and law enforcement from the more daring and committed members of the bloc, as well as demoralizing normal activists who see the sheer numbers in black and leave without ever attempting to exercise their right to speak.

**The Main Bloc:** The best-equipped, prepared, and aggressive members of the bloc will be members of the cluster affinity groups. Some of them carry sturdy flagpoles that can double as impact weapons; others carry backpacks that hold things like umbrellas for blocking pepper spray and the line of sight of police or photographers. Still, other bloc members carry bolt cutters for cutting chains and separating fencing and bike locks for building and binding ersatz barricades from bike racks—not to mention for use as an impact weapon by itself, most famously by Antifa member, and professor, Eric Clanton in Berkeley on April 15, 2017. They're likely to also be equipped with spray paint for marking territory claimed and flashbang-equivalent improvised explosive devices made from gutting and combining fireworks (some of which have their own propellant-launched delivery mechanism to assault police or guards on rooftops).

Antifa members have also been found to carry expandable batons, slingshots, and various projectiles; laser pointers to dazzle police and blind cameras or even blind surveillance drones; and water balloons and plastic bottles filled with various caustic substances, all ready to use by the carrier—or pass out to allies—as needed.



### ***Bloc Maneuver Warfare***

Antifa street tactics are biased in favor of flexible, skirmisher-style, and ranged-attack options. Broadly speaking, a sizable percentage of Antifa members will be there solely to stand with the bloc and engage in ranged attacks with various projectiles but will be less enthusiastic about prolonged hand-to-hand combat.

However, when the situation calls for it, Antifa members have proven willing and able to concentrate numbers to achieve local superiority—even defeating riot police details on occasion. An example of this can be seen in the January 20, 2017, Trump inauguration protests, where almost 100 members of a black bloc were kettled by D.C. police at 12th and L streets. The bloc managed to form an umbrella-shielded phalanx, defeated a veritable bath of pepper spray, and then bulldozed through a frantic police line before escaping back into the city to wreak further havoc.

As a general rule, however, expect Antifa to flow like water around obstacles thrown up in their path instead of charging head-on. Speed and misdirection are their friends: splitting up; taking side streets; tossing small handmade IEDs from the flanks to distract, confuse, terrorize, and push away; stacking barricades; and burning cars to block and frustrate movement. Blocs rarely travel without scouts moving ahead and on the flanks, in addition to prepositioned spotters often spread throughout the operational area, although this frequently breaks down when things get especially hectic.

Antifa is willing and able to engage in pitched melee battles when the conditions are right, but they strongly prefer to have a significant advantage in numbers when dealing with any kind of organized resistance.

One downside to hit-and-run tactics and ranged attacks is the risk of being cut off and isolated in congested city downtown districts, potentially leading to defeat in detail from police forces and opposition demonstrators. On several occasions in 2017 and 2018, Antifa forces found themselves routed and/or kettled by savvy law

enforcement and other groups due to judicious use of barricades and street layout to separate, pin down, and neutralize smaller elements of a much larger black bloc. If Antifa has learned from Hong Kong protesters to “be like water,” then it necessarily follows that an effective response will involve damming and redirecting to control the shape of the Antifa force in order to determine the outcome.

### ***Black Bloc Risks***

One challenge for Antifa—as it has been for other radical groups throughout history—is the tendency for one particularly exciting or hard-core tactic to become a major element of the group’s identity, to the point where it is applied even in situations where it’s counterproductive. This can be quite disastrous, given these groups already make it a point to stay at a level of violence just barely within the boundaries of what radical leftist politics will accept.

The age of mass media threatens the tradition and utility of the bloc. In countless superhero and martial arts movies in popular culture the “bad guys” are distinguished from the “good guys” using masked, intimidating henchmen uniformly dressed in dark colors—a fairly close facsimile of a black bloc. This combined with ubiquitous livestreaming capability leading to video clips of Antifa assaults on social media—mostly split between their members viciously assaulting apparently normal Americans doing mainstream things such as waving American flags and, occasionally, those same people successfully defending themselves from Antifa attack—can leave Antifa in an understandably awkward position.

Antifa’s choice to deploy black blocs at inopportune times has led to significant problems for them on several occasions. Most significant was the August 27, 2017, turnout to oppose the “No to Marxism in America” rally held at Berkeley’s MLK Civic Center Park.

Tensions across the nation were already high in the aftermath of the calamitous so-called “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, just two weeks earlier (the two rallies were by separate

organizers and not related). Multiple leftist groups collaborated to turn out roughly 10,000 protesters spearheaded by (according to some estimates) a nearly 500 member-strong black bloc escorting a flatbed truck loaded with clubs and shields manufactured by a local bike shop in Oakland. The black bloc had little trouble sweeping Berkeley Police from the park, and once they realized the by-now canceled rally had drawn only a handful of Trump supporters, they took out their pent-up frustration at the lack of targets directly on the media.

The images of faceless, black-clad goons routing riot police and beating journalists mercilessly once again reversed the fickle American public mood and led to fierce condemnation from all levels of media figures and government officials.

San Francisco native and House Democratic Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi demanded Antifa be “arrested and prosecuted” and Berkeley Mayor Jesse Arreguin referred to them as a “militia,” broached the idea they should be classified as a gang, and contemplated additional action and sanction against the group.

The blowback was so intense that at Ben Shapiro’s September 14 UC Berkeley appearance the following month, an undercover journalist dressed in black was confronted by a small group in plain clothes and asked why she hadn’t “gotten the word” to “lay low for now.”

#### “DIVERSITY OF TACTICS”—SWIMMING THROUGH THE LEFT

Antifa does not operate in a vacuum. It relies on a complicated but collaborative relationship with other less-militant mass-movement leftist activist groups. In accordance with Mao’s dictum on the matter, Antifa swims through the broader left like a fish through water:

Historically, at demonstrations, almost every Bloc that has mixed well with a much larger mass of law-abiding protesters has managed to maintain some degree of safety and coherence, while almost every

Bloc that has attempted to operate in their absence has suffered or at least risked serious police repression.<sup>73</sup>

Even so, Antifa's choice of tactics can often be polarizing, and thus, it is required to choose a carefully targeted base of support and expand from there. In short, Antifa considers it preferable to choose aggression over broad approval when the two conflict. Bray writes,

Rather than imposing what is essentially an electoral mindset of appealing to the lowest common denominator in relation to the fascist threat, anti-fascists prioritize working with marginal communities to neutralize any potential threats, whether it's popular with "the majority" or not ... anti-fascists believe that developing substantive popular support must stem from anti-fascist politics and anti-fascist action, not the other way around.<sup>74</sup>

One of Antifa's prominent talking points is not only that it directly confronts fascists but also that it provides "community defense" against "fascists"—implicating the police—as well. It is not uncommon with larger demonstrations for Antifa's spokescouncil to work closely with local activist groups and generate written agreements for spelling out clear guidelines and expectations for conduct by all parties.

One example of such an agreement is the one between San Francisco Bay Area Antifa and activist groups created for a collaborative response to various rallies scheduled for the weekend of August 26–27 in the Bay Area, including the previously mentioned No to Marxism in America rally as well as a separate event scheduled for Crissy Field in San Francisco the preceding day. Among a detailed list of rules—originally leaked to *Berkeleyside* and excerpted below—activists agreed not to take photographs of Antifa members or cooperate with police and decided to attend at least one session of nonviolent direct-action training organized by known Antifa allies:

1. We agree to prioritize attending a non-violent direct action/de-escalation training in the next week, especially if we have not

attended one in the past. A list of available trainings will be disseminated by email by Thursday, 8/17.

[...]

3. Participants agree to stand in solidarity with all counter-protestors resisting fascism on this day. While we may not personally like all the tactics we witness, we will not talk to the police or the media about any action taken by our fellow counter-protestors.

[...]

7. We will not talk to police except to direct them to the designated police liaison.

8. We will not take photos or video of Antifa except by permission or from behind, and even then, we will take care not to show faces, shoes, or backpacks that could make them identifiable.<sup>75</sup>

As can be seen, far from being intended to limit Antifa's courses of action, the agreements protect Antifa by putting the onus on the peaceful protesters to at least tacitly support Antifa tactics.

The training sessions Antifa demanded for their allies were in fact held. Multiple training sessions were hosted around the Bay Area in spaces provided by local nonprofits. According to sources who attended, each event trained 100–200 people at a time and covered a wide gamut of skills—from basic mindset and situational awareness to pointers on electronic security, how to safely move in a coordinated fashion in a closely-packed large group, and even a brief overview on how to perform basic personal security detail techniques such as forming protective details around a VIP.

VIPs, in this context, meant individuals who might be arrested. Instruction was provided on flexible de-arrest and protection techniques aimed at defeating police attempts to detain and arrest black bloc members but could easily serve double duty as training to snatch opponents and separate them from their own group.

Training events such as these not only serve as ways to further inculcate the concept of a “diversity of tactics,” where space is given

for different groups to pursue a variety of different, compatible ways to reach their goal, but also provide a basic skill set that's adaptable across a wide range of scenarios.

By choosing to appear alongside peaceful protesters, the bloc members not only ensure the response capacity of security forces is strained but also force them into a "dilemma action": a lose-lose situation—where police either have to relent and allow the bloc a certain freedom of action or respond with force in a way that can be portrayed as disproportionately heavy-handed against the backdrop of nonviolent demonstrators, who may very well be ready and willing to defend the Antifa in their midst.

Whenever the police threatened tear gas or rubber bullets, non-violent protesters lined up at the front with their hands up in the air, chanting, "Hands up, don't shoot!" ... When the cops deployed outside the precincts, their police lines frequently found themselves facing a line of 'non-violent' protestors. This had the effect of temporarily stabilizing the space of conflict and gave other crowd members a stationary target ... we are used to seeing more confrontational tactics used to shield those practicing non-violence (e.g., at Standing Rock and Charlottesville). The reversal of this relationship in Minneapolis afforded greater autonomy to those employing confrontational tactics.<sup>76</sup>

An extraordinarily effective application of this is the recent Grant Park assault that resulted in 49 injured Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers. A CPD surveillance video breakdown showed a well-orchestrated Antifa black bloc rapidly form in the midst of a BLM march and then lead the demonstrators against a contingent of officers guarding a nearby Columbus statue.

The bloc built an ersatz shield wall from large framed banners, marched directly to the base of the statue to pin the relatively lightly protected law enforcement force in place with sharpened pipes and small tossed IEDs, and then deployed frozen drinks and water bottles among the crowd to throw as projectile weapons. The injuries included 18 hospitalized officers and one sergeant that received an

explosive injury to the face, including a broken orbital socket and potential permanent eye injuries.

The CPD officers were quickly pushed from the park, and the protesters built their own bicycle wall to keep law enforcement from interfering as the bloc surrounded the statue and attempted to tear it down with ropes. Although they failed to pull it down, the level of coordination and mutual support between the bloc and putative “peaceful protesters” was disturbing.

In the wake of ongoing riots following the George Floyd shooting, we have seen the government and law enforcement spokespeople rely on the language of “outside agitators” to imply Antifa is operating against the will and without the knowledge of overall protest organizers. While this argument may make sense from the public relations point of view, it can prove a dangerous assumption for local law enforcement, journalists, and others present when Antifa black bloc tactics are being deployed.

### ***Legal Observers and Doxing***

One of Antifa’s most underestimated allies is the National Lawyers Guild (NLG), a far-left legal association with historic ties to the Communist Party,<sup>77</sup> and its army of legal observers and advisors. NLG members earned their reputations at court defending violent radicals. From the notoriously unrepentant Angela Davis (who provided weapons used in the murder of a Marin county judge) to terrorist mastermind Omar “the Blind Sheikh” Abdel Rahman. While they have acted as standard lawyers for many terrorists and radicals, they are perhaps most readily identifiable from their ubiquitous presence at left-wing protests, distinguished by their lime green hats. Ever present, NLG members film the action, take notes, and provide advice to protesters. They also provide follow up jail support. If you see a phone number written in sharpie on a protester’s arm, it’s usually the number to the local NLG hotline.

NLG legal observers strive to avoid appearing directly involved in the mayhem, but they actually play a critical role in acquiring intelligence for later use. You'll see them filming and photographing closely; paying attention to identifying marks, embroidered corporate logos, and names; and taking pictures of license plates. All of this information is likely to be turned over to Antifa researchers for future doxing purposes so Antifa targets may be identified, harassed, and publicly shamed in the future. In this way, NLG's presence allows Antifa to further its mission of raising the cost of participating in First Amendment activities. Tactics include swarming a participant's employer with complaints and demands that Antifa's opponents be fired. This sort of indirect tactics is difficult to respond to, is usually completely legal, and doesn't produce striking imagery to rile up public opinion.

To quote Shane Burley, public Antifa activist, again,

The point here is simple: to continually raise the cost of participating in organized fascist formations, to destabilize those organizations by interrupting the lives of the people in them, and then to watch them dissolve.<sup>78</sup>

### ***Armed Antifascist Groups***

Increasingly, armed protesters are appearing at Antifa actions. It is a growing concern for law enforcement. Armed Antifa groups play several useful roles as part of Antifa's "diversity of tactics" approach.

There are currently several leftist groups devoted to arms and activism, the most well-known is the Antifa-aligned Redneck Revolt network and, to a lesser extent, the Socialist Rifle Association.

There is also the more centrist Liberal Gun Club, as well as LGBTQ-centric groups such as the Trigger Warning Queer & Trans Gun Club.

The most extreme armed group appears to be the Red Guards network. Thankfully, this collection of avowed Maoists seems to be as incompetent as they are militant. Most of their chapters have been



dissolved, and their most notable actions have consisted of publicly disrupting events hosted by the “electoralist” Democratic Socialists of America.

Armed antifascist groups serve a complementary role to conventional Antifa—ideologically aligned while pursuing different strategies and skill sets. At present, they appear unlikely to openly participate in Antifa direct actions.

The notable exception appears to be Willem Van Spronsen, a member of Puget Sound John Brown Gun Club (JBGC) who was shot and killed by law enforcement in 2019 during an armed assault on an ICE facility in Tacoma, Washington, with a rifle and improvised incendiary devices.

In two other known cases—Connor Betts in Dayton, Ohio, in 2019, who engaged in a mass shooting at a local bar, and Charles Fredrick Landeros in Eugene, Oregon, in 2018, who was shot by a school resource officer after pulling a pistol—individuals with ties to armed Antifa groups have engaged in attacks with firearms. But neither of those cases appear to be ideologically motivated.

It is important to note, however, that Spronsen (and, to a lesser extent, Landeros) were effectively lauded for their actions by their local Antifa groups, and Spronsen, in particular, has reached nearly a “martyr” status among some Antifa groups. It is worth considering that this could represent a negative trend toward the willingness of such groups to countenance such attacks.

Armed Antifa groups fulfill three roles within the context of Antifa’s larger strategic objectives:

1. Outreach to the rural white working class, using guns and gun rights as a cultural bridge.
2. Provide firearms training to liberals/leftists and ostensibly “at-risk” minorities.
3. Fulfill a security and deterrence role at events and protests, allowing Antifa to essentially “clear and hold” territory.

## **Gun Culture: Rural versus Urban**

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, while Antifa is principally aimed at establishing a form of political control in key urban centers, there is a growing effort to introduce its ideology rural to working-class individuals using firearms.

We use gun culture as a way to relate to people ... No liberal elitism. Our basic message is: guns are fine, but racism is not.<sup>79</sup>

We also definitely display weapons on the tables to add some credibility to our organization and our views and to yet again, illustrate that we're not some pro-gun control liberals. I can't overstate how important it is for us, as anti-racists trying to organize within the white working class, that we distance ourselves from upper-middle class Democrats.<sup>80</sup>

Gun rights and ownership is a politically charged issue across America, with urban blue areas generally having stricter laws around ownership and less of a "gun culture" than rural areas. While Antifa is a phenomenon currently strongest in blue state urban areas, armed antifascist groups have their greatest presence in red/purple states and rural areas. The Redneck Revolt network, in particular, has built a brand and messaging campaign targeted squarely at the rural white working class. Guns function as common ground—a sort of cultural touchstone, a way to reach out to a subculture that may not initially be open to leftist ideology and then remind them that rural whites weren't always so right-wing:

In 1921, the term [Redneck] became synonymous with armed insurrection against capitalists and the state, as members of the United Mine Workers of America tied red bandanas around their necks during the Battle of Blair Mountain, a two week long armed labor uprising in the coalfields of West Virginia.<sup>81</sup>

Admittedly "Redneck" can be a loaded term in certain contexts and possibly complicate recruiting and collaboration with minorities, so some chapters have chosen to use the moniker "John Brown Gun

Club” after the abolitionist executed following his assault on an armory during a failed attempt to instigate a slave uprising at Harper’s Ferry.

Still, armed Antifa group efforts to organize at the rural level suggest a level of confidence about the ability to expand beyond urban centers, increasing the movement’s overall reach.

### **Training for “Community Defense”**

Part of this outreach is conducted by offering firearms training to those who may be interested in pursuing firearms but who have an ideological objection to the more common gun rights organizations, such as the NRA. These armed Antifa groups have earned much goodwill by making a big show of organizing training events.

At the moment, the Puget Sound JBGC, which was founded less than four months after Trump took office, has around 30 active members. But its firearms safety and marksmanship workshops fill up faster every time the club hosts them. Full members undergo lengthy vetting, but anyone can come learn how guns work, what the parts are, and how to handle them safely, before going to the range and learning to shoot. “We’re talking about white liberals, mostly women, who are like ‘let’s get this class going,’” the club’s founder, Duke Aaron, said. “Two years ago these people would be like ‘Guns? This is terrible.’ That’s not the reaction now.”<sup>82</sup>

While not everyone that trains with an armed Antifa group will end up becoming a member, the offered trainings provide the group the opportunity to appear useful, make allies, and build a support network that can be called upon for favors and donations, as well as draws individuals into more conventional types of activism.

The critical distinction, however, is that all of this training is only done within a context of “community defense.” Armed antifascist groups explicitly reject the common notion among mainstream gun culture—and codified in American constitutional law—that firearms ownership is primarily an individual right for the purposes of

personal safety and the protection of property. Instead, they advocate for a collectivist interpretation that guns are tools existing solely for community liberation and defense.

Furthermore, their definition of “community” does not necessarily include your immediate family or your neighbors. They use a Marxist definition that emphasizes material conditions and identity politics. In their world, you don’t automatically have a right to possess guns to protect yourself or your loved ones (much less your business). You only accrue a right to bear arms if you agree to use them to advance collective class interests and the revolution.

### **Deterrence and Push-Hold**

The presence of firearms does create complications at Antifa actions because of its reliance on the principle of low-intensity violence and intimidation.

The optics and legal liability involved with firearms possession—especially the open carry of firearms—at mass assemblies provide a strong incentive for those armed to avoid engaging in illegal behavior. Felony enhancements for firearms possession in the commission of violent criminal acts make armed Antifa unable to participate in the black bloc. It is still uncommon to see armed Antifa groups show up at a protest where a sizable organized black bloc is expected.

On the occasions when they do both show up, they usually keep themselves separate. It does not take much imagination to understand the potentially bad outcomes of stressed and outnumbered riot cops shooting flash bangs to disrupt a black bloc, only to spot armed individuals emerging from the crowd.

So ironically, the presence of firearms seriously limits Antifa’s tactical options and range of permissible tactics. Yet while armed antifascist groups may not be able to get aggressive the same way, their unarmed comrades can, but they can fulfill a valuable defensive role.

Redneck Revolt/JBGC network chapters will escort marches and “guard” protests not just to deter potential counterprotesters but also

to raise the stakes sufficiently to prevent law enforcement from breaking up the action.

As the black militant liberation group the Black Panthers showed back in the 1960s, as the Zapatistas showed in the '90s, and as anarchists in New Orleans showed during the aftermath of Katrina, when cops and other fascists see that they're not the only ones packing, the balance of power shifts, and they tend to reconsider their tactics.<sup>83</sup>

Law enforcement should remember that when armed Antifa groups claim they are prepared to use firearms to protect protesters from "fascists," they absolutely include "law enforcement" in that category.

There's another application of this principle we've seen most recently with Seattle's so-called Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone or CHAZ, and it's a tactic this author has tentatively labeled Push-Hold: conventional Antifa pushes opposition (either counterprotesters or law enforcement) out of a given territory, and armed Antifa affiliates move in behind to hold the space. Think of a ratcheting effect, where black blocs and protesters harass opposing forces until they retreat and then armed antifascists flood the vacated area with a much greater chance of holding it by drastically increasing the liability and potential downsides of trying to retake it. This works due to the legal and cultural climate for civilian firearms use in the United States, which provides much more latitude for a defensive usage of a weapon than the offensive.

This technique was perhaps most visibly applied in the seizure by Antifa and allied protesters at what came to be called the CHAZ—previously the area around the East Precinct of the Seattle Police Department.

The CHAZ was established on June 8, 2020, after nine days of street clashes with protesters and Antifa against the police and National Guard, centered around the East Precinct Seattle Police Department station. While the protesters and rioters who forced the

police out were primarily armed with fireworks, lasers, and other materials, once government forces pulled out, armed members of Puget Sound JBGC moved in and began patrolling and establishing roadblocks and barricades. On several livestreams, Puget Sound JBGC members could be seen coordinating with Rose City Antifa leader Luis Marquez.

Other armed groups were also operating in the zone under the presumed control of local rapper Raz Simone. It seems likely that limited coordination between armed groups may have played a role in the multiple shootings that ultimately provided the impetus for the Seattle mayor to send in the police to restore order.

Still, given the effectiveness of the “Push-Hold” tactic, we should not be surprised to see similar autonomous zones in the future, as the Antifa and its allies deploy hard-earned lessons about combined arms tactics against future objectives.

## CONCLUSION: OPERANT CONDITIONING

Whether armed or unarmed/protesting or counterprotesting and whether wielding bike locks in person or doxing and harassing online, it cannot be stated often enough: Antifa’s goal is not violence for violence’s sake. The purpose of Antifa’s brand of low-intensity violence is to silence opposition, to put the cost of political participation out of the reach of everyday Americans.

By deploying the diverse spectrum of tactics described in this chapter, Antifa seeks to create what David Hines refers to as “operant conditioning.”<sup>84</sup> That the mere idea that some course of action may draw Antifa’s attention becomes enough to encourage someone to abandon it. Ultimately, the most efficient—and invisible—censorship is when people censor themselves.

Even when Antifa and its allies fail to shut down a specific event, the cumulative effect of individual harassment and massive security bills—UC Berkeley spent \$800,000 in extra security costs for Milo Yiannopoulos’ truncated Free Speech Week in the fall of 2017, not to

mention \$100,000 for his preceding canceled event in the spring—is often enough to encourage private venues to cancel reservations and refuse to host targeted groups. Publicly complaining about the harassment and expenses doesn't help things either, as it just amplifies the Antifa message that dissent from leftist orthodoxy will be extremely costly.

Even public venues such as universities—at least theoretically committed to being free speech forums—can be put out of reach. Policies often require an invitation from student organizations, thus inviting the targeting of students by Antifa pressure campaigns and harassment from the numerous well-organized lefty student groups that so often pop up on college campuses.

Coordinated action inside of events, exploiting the ticketing system to overwhelm it, using waves of disruptions that are more difficult to quarantine, and planned actions inside the venue are the kinds of tools that shift control away from the speaker and into the hands of organizers looking to stop it from being able to meaningfully continue.<sup>85</sup>

Even the president of the United States is not immune to these kinds of schemes, as Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez cackled about organizers using the Chinese social media app TikTok to buy up available seating for the president's Tulsa, OK, rally.<sup>86</sup>

As Bray says,

Our goal should be that in twenty years those who voted for Trump are too uncomfortable to share that fact in public. We may not always be able to change someone's beliefs, but we sure as hell can make it politically, socially, economically, and sometimes physically costly to articulate them.<sup>87</sup>

Antifa must be understood, first and foremost, as an organized effort to prevent Americans from exercising their rights. In the same way, the Ku Klux Klan was formed in the Reconstruction South to neuter the civil rights recently granted to Blacks, Antifa seeks to prevent any who disagree with them from engaging in the political process.





# The Murky Money Trail

By Matthew Vadum

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## WHO'S PAYING FOR THIS?

All revolutionary insurgencies require funding. In the United States, Founding Father and financier Robert Morris looked to markets to secure funds to support the American Revolutionary War, and his colleague, Haym Salomon, donated much of his fortune to the cause.

Broadly speaking, Communist takeovers tend to rely on banditry and contributions from outside the country concerned. In Tsarist Russia, Imperial Germany funneled money to the Bolsheviks, who also resorted to bank robberies to finance the October 1917 coup d'état that led to the creation of the Soviet Union. After initially aiding Chiang Kai-shek, the Soviets flipped and provided support for Mao Zedong's Communists, who eventually triumphed when the People's Republic of China was declared in 1949. The revolution was also financed through the opium trade.

How Antifa is financing its promised overthrow of the United States government is far from clear-cut. We know surprisingly little about who fills Antifa's coffers. Even the American government—itsself in Antifa's crosshairs—does not seem to know where the money is coming from.

In the summer of 2020, Attorney General William Barr discussed the Department of Justice investigating Antifa financing.

“We have some investigations underway and very focused investigations on certain individuals that relate to Antifa,” Barr said. The probes will examine the sources of funding behind the extremist groups and the coordinated tactics they use, he said. “Some of it relates to an Antifa. Some of it relates to groups that act very much like an Antifa. As I said, there's a witch's brew of

extremist groups that are trying to exploit this situation on all sides.”<sup>88</sup>

President Donald Trump speculated about who funded the angry mob that accosted attendees as they left the White House following the conclusion of the 2020 Republican National Convention. The violent demonstrations were financed by “some very stupid rich people.” He told TV host Laura Ingraham that “people you’ve never heard of, people in the dark shadows” are bankrolling much of the violence. “The money is coming from some very stupid rich people [who] have no idea that if their thing ever succeeded, which it won’t, they will be thrown to the wolves like you’ve never seen before,” he said.<sup>89</sup>

Sen. Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican who was one of the RNC attendees manhandled by demonstrators after leaving the White House, demanded answers about the agitators. “My question is: Who are these people?” Paul wrote in an op-ed. “Who paid for their hotel rooms? Who flew them in? Law enforcement needs to look at the funding of violent criminal activity like this. And national Democrats need to confront it. It’s organized. It’s paid for. It’s violent. It’s not about Black lives or any lives; it’s about anarchy and destruction.”<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, some argue that Antifa’s revolutionary antics just aren’t that expensive. For example, Antifa cheerleader and academic Mark Bray, author of *Antifa: The Antifascist Handbook*, downplays the role of money in the world of Antifa:

Like most anarchist, anti-authoritarian or radical groups, Antifa organizations don’t have much money at their disposal. What they do have generally comes from members or occasional solidarity fundraisers. Unlike political parties, unions or nongovernmental organizations, they don’t require significant funds.

Much of what Antifa activists do doesn’t cost much, if any, money, according to Bray. Antifa intimidates its enemies and attempts to silence them, actions that can be accomplished with minimal expenditures.

Bray writes that Antifa organizations

conduct research... online, in person, and sometimes infiltration; they dox them, push cultural milieux to disown them, pressure bosses to fire them, and demand that venues cancel their shows, conferences, and meetings... But it is also true that some of them punch Nazis in the face and don't apologize for it.<sup>91</sup>

If Bray is right, perhaps funding is less important to Antifa than to more traditional political movements. Maybe generating chaos in the service of revolutionary change is less expensive than some think.

On the other hand, the sheer number and scale of the riots and violent protest actions Antifa was involved in throughout 2020 across the United States makes it difficult for many to believe Antifa militants act without significant financial backing.

Bernard B. Kerik, former New York City Police Commissioner, said Antifa “100 percent exploited” the protests over George Floyd’s May 2020 death and that Antifa websites displayed details of planned protests. Such an ambitious campaign—including coordination, equipment, and travel expenses—would likely cost “tens of millions of dollars,” he said. Kerik offered an anecdote in which an FBI agent friend of his said she saw “probably 25 of these Antifa kids walking in through the [Newark] airport.”

“They’re coming from other cities,” he said. “That costs money. They didn’t do this on their own. Somebody’s paying for this.”

John Miller, the New York Police Department’s Deputy Commissioner of Intelligence and Counterterrorism, said these radicals use scouts, medics, and supply rocks, bottles, and accelerants “for breakaway groups to commit vandalism and violence.” These groups preplan violent attacks, relying on encrypted communications, he said.<sup>92</sup>

Miller said the following about the political violence that took place in late May 2020:

Before the protests began, organizers of certain anarchist groups set out to raise bail money and people who would be responsible to be

raising bail money, they set out to recruit medics and medical teams with gear to deploy in anticipation of violent interactions with police.<sup>93</sup>

The intelligence was gathered by New York's Joint Terrorism Task Force. "They prepared to commit property damage and directed people who were following them that this should be done selectively and only in wealthier areas or at high-end stores run by corporate entities."<sup>94</sup>

Kerik noted there seems to be a clear overlap between Antifa and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. "What Antifa is doing is they're basically hijacking the black community as their army," Kerik said. "They instigate, they antagonize, they get these young black men and women to go out there and do stupid things, and then they disappear off into the sunset."<sup>95</sup>

U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass.), an outspoken supporter of both Antifa and BLM appeared to agree. In August 2020, during an online campaign event for fellow radical U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), Pressley suggested the two movements were essentially one and the same when she said "the Black Lives Matter activists that are today called Antifa" were "called communists" in the 1960s.<sup>96</sup>

According to press reports, BLM groups have received millions of dollars in donations from corporations, private individual donors, and nonprofit foundations. The *New York Times* noted that over \$90 million was directed to bail funds to release protesters alone.<sup>97</sup>

Is the money flowing to BLM being used to help fund Antifa?

Researcher Trevor Loudon, who specializes in communist organizations operating in the West, said Antifa is just one part of the puzzle, adding that "every significant communist or socialist party in the United States has been involved in these protests and riots from the beginning."

According to Loudon, "Communist Party USA, Liberation Road, Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Organizacion Socialista del Camino para la Libertad (FRSO/OSCL), Democratic Socialists of

America, Revolutionary Communist Party, Workers World Party, and the Party for Socialism and Liberation,” among others, have participated in the violent actions. Some of these organizations, Loudon believes, have direct ties to BLM organizers.

We’ve all heard the story about three young black women—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi ... They just happened to come up with the hashtag “Black Lives Matter”—which then just happened to spark a world-wide movement. In reality, the hashtag got traction because FRSO/OSCL and their armies of sympathizers in the social movements and the media pushed to make it happen.... All three young women were seasoned far-left activists in the orbit of FRSO/Liberation Road.<sup>98</sup>

Whether they wrote checks to Antifa or not, these Marxist groups have provided material support by participating in Antifa-led events.<sup>99</sup>

It seems to properly understand Antifa fundraising, we must look at two separate, but significant, methods of funding and support. The first is the direct transfer of money and supplies to Antifa groups to support their rioting, intimidation, and other criminal activities. The second, and far greater source of support, is the indirect support of organizations and groups that align with, and assist, Antifa’s mission.

## DIRECT SUPPORT

Some individual Antifa supporters are skilled at online fundraising. For example, UC Berkeley student Ismael Chamu, who was accused and then later acquitted on charges of perpetuating pro-Antifa vandalism, raised more than \$85,000 in mere days through crowdfunding after a sympathetic *Los Angeles Times* profile highlighted his tough living conditions.<sup>100</sup>

Antifa organizations appear to be directly funded largely through the use of a series of online fundraising platforms, such as those utilized by the International Anti-Fascist Defence Fund.

But at the same time, Bray admits Antifa does have an organized and international fundraising structure: an organization called the International Anti-Fascist Defence Fund, which “collects small donations primarily for legal and medical support,” according to Bray.<sup>101</sup>

Founded in June 2015, the International Anti-Fascist Defence Fund “provides direct, immediate support to anti-fascists and anti-racists anywhere in the world, whenever they find themselves in a difficult situation as a result of their stand against hate,” according to the Action Network, a fundraising platform.

Whether it’s replacing damaged/stolen property, paying medical bills, helping them find a safe place to stay, funding legal defence, helping their families, or doing Antifa prisoner support, this Fund seeks to alleviate the harm that results from doing the right thing sometimes.<sup>102</sup>

In its first five years, it has given more than €76,000 (\$83,000) “to help out more than 500 antifascists in 22 different countries.” Every decision the fund makes “is reached democratically by the Defence Fund’s Decisions Crew—a body of 863 antifascists ... from around the world. Every time we provide support to an antifascist, we blog about it, so our decisions are as transparent as possible.”<sup>103</sup>

Bray writes little about Antifa finance in his book, but what he does write suggests Antifa’s level of sophistication in the realm of fundraising is roughly on par with churches and community groups using the most basic, but time-tested, fundraising methods, such as holding community bake sales. He notes that “at the time of this writing, a fundraising campaign to create an “anti-fascist, anti-racist, anti-sexist gym in Chicago, Illinois, is underway ... with plans to call it Haymaker.”<sup>104</sup>

He quotes the Britain-based Anti-Fascist Network,

All groups have to consider how to fund-raise. Participating in any local social centre helps with booking rooms for fund-raising events, but monies can be raised by collection boxes in bookshops,

stalls at friendly political meetings and cultural events or organizing fund-raising gigs.<sup>105</sup>

An independent journalist, Andy Ngo, told a Senate panel that Antifa groups rely on crowdfunding to support their violent actions in Oregon. “Antifa and its allies have made rioting an art form in Portland,” Ngo said. “They have access to rich streams of cash flowing from platforms like GoFundMe, Venmo, and CashApp. Any conspirator arrested in Portland is instantly bailed out and ready for the next time of violent protest.”<sup>106</sup>

Revolutionaries, like everyone else, get hungry, so some entrepreneurial leftists put together a nonprofit outfit called Riot Kitchen. “Riot Kitchen is a movement to feed people,” its website states. “We feed protesters, we feed people in need. We feed the revolution.” The website contains a “make a donation” button and states, “Our operations run purely on donations and fundraisers.”<sup>107</sup> But law enforcement now believes Seattle-based Riot Kitchen was providing more than just hot meals. Acting on a tip, local police and U.S. marshals arrested nine of the group’s members in Kenosha, Wisconsin, who were allegedly seen filling up containers of gasoline. The group’s vehicles reportedly contained riot equipment, including “gas masks, helmets, protective vests, illegal fireworks and suspected controlled substances.”<sup>108</sup>

Riot Kitchen got its start in the summer of 2020, when Antifa and BLM activists took over six city blocks in downtown Seattle creating an autonomous zone initially called the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone.

Police and local businesses alleged that the revolutionaries quickly turned to threats to raise funds. One police officer said, “Antifa are extorting money and businesses in the Capitol Hill Zone for protection money ... employing stop and frisk to anyone who walks through and shaking down businesses for \$500 for protection.”<sup>109</sup>

While these examples of direct support show an impressive degree of coordination and commitment, the amounts involved

remain relatively small. This suggests the real high-dollar support is provided through indirect means.

## INDIRECT SUPPORT

While Antifa's material needs—including riot materials, weapons, shields, and other tools of revolution—are relatively inexpensive and can be acquired through a variety of community fundraising and crowdfunding techniques, larger costs such as travel, lodging, and most importantly, bail funds and legal defense are higher ticket items.

Antifa relies heavily on “support organizations such as the Democratic Socialists of America, the International Workers of the World, Refuse Fascism, and the National Lawyers Guild and in coordination with other protest organizations,” CSP's Shideler said in testimony before a U.S. Senate subcommittee investigating Antifa.<sup>110</sup>

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the nation's largest Marxist group, formed an alliance with Antifa in 2019. DSA officially embraced Antifa when delegates at its convention voted to convene an “antifascist working group.” Its supporters say the move “institutionalizes the fight against fascism as an official DSA initiative” and would “help drive collaboration and resource sharing to support our antifascist organizing because we must fight exploitation, white supremacy, and patriarchy.”<sup>111</sup>

There are several organizations devoted to posting bail for arrested protesters so they can get back on the streets and resume causing trouble.

Four days into the riots that erupted in Minneapolis after the death of George Floyd, the Minnesota Freedom Fund, founded in 2016, had taken in tens of thousands of donations from around the world worth a total of about \$20 million. “Everyone around the world is ready for justice,” Tonja Honsey, the executive director of the fund, crowed to the *New York Times*. “They're ready for real change, and



they're supporting that." It is unclear exactly how many Antifa members have been freed by the Minnesota Freedom Fund.<sup>112</sup>

Two months before former Vice President Joe Biden named Kamala Harris as his 2020 running mate, the California senator urged Americans to financially support the Minnesota Freedom Fund. "If you're able to, chip in now to the @MNFreedomFund to help post bail for those protesting on the ground in Minnesota," Harris wrote on her Twitter page on June 1, 2020.<sup>113</sup>

At least 13 members of Biden's presidential campaign staff also contributed to the fund. Before George Floyd died on May 25, 2020, the fund had raised only about \$75,000 that year.<sup>114</sup> The fund bailed out an accused murderer and an accused rapist-kidnapper, paying \$100,000 and \$350,000, respectively.<sup>115</sup>

Of course, bail funds aren't much use without legal services to support them. One of the most important organizations that provide bail services and legal representation for Antifa and other left-wing protesters is the National Lawyers Guild (NLG), which attorney Bradley Betters calls "the movement's unofficial legal arm."

Made up of thousands of hard-left lawyers spread out in over 150 chapters across the country (not including over 100 student chapters), and funded by giant philanthropists like the Ford Foundation and George Soros, the NLG [National Lawyers Guild] explicitly and openly coordinates legal action and public relations in support of the Antifa movement. As one chapter states online, the guild's member-lawyers "understand that legal support is critical in the planning and aftermath of any action" and "can usually mobilize NLG volunteer lawyers to handle initial court appearances, and ... often continue to defend activists pro bono."<sup>116</sup>

In addition to representing Antifa, the NLG routinely sues police and brags that its work facilitates Antifa violence. In its newsletter, NLG states that it "has been able to influence the way police in Portland handle protests" and that when conservative group Patriot Prayer held a rally in 2018, police were surprisingly "fairly hands-off"

and “deploy[ed] significantly fewer crowd control weapons than the previous year.”

“This approach,” the newsletter states, “also enabled more left-right skirmishes to occur,” as well as “numerous clashes result[ing] in the bloodiest showdown” yet.<sup>117</sup>

NLG also helped to organize protests and provided legal defenses for those who violently protested the inauguration of President Trump in January 2017. A Washington, D.C.-based Antifa group that protested outside Fox News host Tucker Carlson’s house after posting his address online put a note on its Facebook page letting members know that if “arrested while protesting in DC, the NLG is there to support.” The NLG contact form reads, “Arrested resisting oppression, racism, fascism, or white supremacy? From jail, call: (202) 660-1422 (write this number on your arm).”<sup>118</sup>

Jeremy Ibarra, who participated in an Antifa action involving attacking a Portland, Oregon, free speech rally, reportedly had NLG’s Portland telephone number written on his body when arrested. Ibarra turned down a plea bargain at the suggestion of NLG, saying “fighting fascism is not a crime.”<sup>119</sup>

In a few jurisdictions, it seems Ibarra might be right. In some riot-heavy locations, district attorneys have repeatedly refused to file charges against Antifa and BLM rioters. Some, such as Circuit Attorney Kimberly Gardner, in Missouri have come down hard on law-abiding citizens for defending themselves from violent mobs. Senator Josh Hawley has called for a civil rights investigation into Gardner’s decision to charge lawyers Mark and Patricia McCloskey with felonies for displaying firearms outside their home in July 2020 to ward off a possible attack by protesters.<sup>120</sup>

If every example of a district attorney deciding not to prosecute an Antifa member for political reasons is seen as effectively a contribution of sorts to the cause, then Antifa is well-supported at public expense. Every time police in places such as Portland, Oregon, are ordered to stand down during Antifa actions, that too can be viewed as a contribution to Antifa.

In many cases, these district attorneys are recent officeholders, having been elected with the assistance of campaign funds provided as part of an aggressive campaign of installing antipolice, prodecriminalization district attorneys. The funder behind that campaign was the *bête noire* of many conservatives, radical billionaire George Soros.<sup>121</sup>

## THE SOROS QUESTION

Is Soros one of those “very stupid rich people” operating in the “dark shadows” that President Trump alleged was behind recent rioting? While Soros remains a very controversial figure, there is some justification for the concern.

A Project Veritas undercover video revealed that George Soros funded an “antifascist” organization known as Refuse Fascism, according to one of the group’s chapter leaders.<sup>122</sup>

Refuse Fascism, founded by members of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), was formed soon after Republican Donald Trump’s unexpected victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election. The group summed up its mission on its website: “It’s Fascism: Drive Out the Trump/Pence Regime!”

The RCP is a Maoist organization founded by 1960s’ radical Bob Avakian. The RCP reportedly played a role in organizing riots in Ferguson, Missouri,<sup>123</sup> as well as in the 1992 LA Riots.<sup>124</sup>

Refuse Fascism also participated in rioting on February 1, 2017, at UC Berkeley as part of what is called a “deplatforming” action, a classic Antifa tactic. The objective, which was achieved, was to prevent controversial conservative writer Milo Yiannopoulos from delivering a speech on campus. The rioting caused more than \$500,000 in damage on- and off-campus.<sup>125</sup>

The mechanism by which Soros’s organization appears to have supported Refuse Fascism is instructive. Soros’s Open Society Foundations gave grants to a far-left nonprofit known as the Alliance for Global Justice (AfGJ), which was founded in 1998 “by members of

the Nicaragua Network, an organization that had been created nineteen years earlier to support the Marxist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.”

Describing itself as an “anti-capitalist,” “anti-imperialist,” and a “people’s think tank,” whose activities include “a whole lot of organizing,” AfGJ’s mission is to create and aid revolutionaries who will fight to change the world along anarcho-communist lines. It aspires to train young activists to help create “a socially, ecologically and economically just world” that offers “alternatives” to the “domination of governments, global financial institutions, and multinational corporations which denigrate the world’s peoples and devastate ecosystems.”

AfGJ’s agenda is similar to that of the Occupy Wall Street movement, which was launched with an occupation of a park in Lower Manhattan in September 2011. Income inequality is a great evil that must be combated, AfGJ maintains. The group parrots Marxist and anarchist slogans and platitudes—denouncing “neoliberal economics,” “corporate globalization,” and “privatization” and arguing that “a just society is oriented toward meeting the needs ... of its own people, not toward creating vast inequality and mega-profits for those at the top at the expense of the many.”

Markets are tools used to oppress, not liberate, according to the group. To fight “the concentration of wealth and power [that] is the root cause of oppression,” there has to be a “fundamental change in international and national conditions that disempower people, create [economic and political] disparities, poison the earth, and plunder its resources.” The group claims government has a responsibility to meet what it considers to be the right of people to shelter, food, health care, education, employment, and leisure and pull down “structures that distribute wealth in ways that deny anyone those basic rights.”

Open Society Foundations (OSF), previously known as the Open Society Institute, has given a minimum of \$100,000 to AfGJ since 2004. The group, in turn, funneled \$50,000 to Refuse Fascism through a legal mechanism known as fiscal sponsorship.

Fiscal sponsorship allows donors who want to give to a group that lacks tax-exempt status to donate instead to an established, government-recognized nonprofit. Foundations are generally not allowed to donate to groups that lack official nonprofit status. The donors may then deduct the donation from their income taxes. The nonprofit forwards the funds to the unincorporated group after subtracting a service fee. AfGJ has fiscally sponsored more than 85 separate organizations.<sup>126</sup>

Over the years, AfGJ has accepted grants from the who's who of left-wing institutional donors. These donors include Soros's now-renamed Open Society Foundations, the Tides Foundation and Tides Center, the Ford Foundation, the Arca Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, the Firedoll Foundation, the Brightwater Fund, the New World Foundation, the Foundation for Deep Ecology, the Hill-Snowdon Foundation, the San Francisco Foundation, the Proteus Fund, and the Ben and Jerry's Foundation.

The open-borders, prison reform groups founded by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, FWD.US Inc. and FWD.US Education Fund, have donated to AfGJ. The labor unions AFL-CIO, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and the Laborers' International Union of North America have also donated to AfGJ.<sup>127</sup>

In many cases, fiscal sponsorship can result in a kind of "black box," where it becomes very difficult to track which foundation or donor funded which project.

One insight into Soros's efforts to support BLM was revealed in a 2015 Open Society Institute email leak. Referring to the 2015 Baltimore riots surrounding the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody, the memo noted,

Recent events offer a unique opportunity to accelerate the dismantling of structural inequality generated and maintained by local law enforcement and to engage residents who have historically been disenfranchised in Baltimore City in shaping and monitoring reform.<sup>128</sup>

Author Michelle Malkin notes in her book *Open Borders Inc.: Who's Funding America's Destruction?* a number of other organizations, funded by Soros, that promote left-wing street agitation, silence opposition voices, and support Antifa and BLM. Among the more than 30 such organizations Malkin lists, she notes, in particular, Bend the Arc and CREDO Action—which, together with Washington, D.C. DSA, engaged in Antifa-style tactics targeting Trump officials in their homes and at restaurants. She also points out that the Soros-funded Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law has provided legal support for Antifa/BLM rioters outside Lafayette Square.<sup>129</sup>

Many of the same groups Malkin identifies in her list as funded by Open Society Foundations have historically also been funded by other major left-wing foundations.

## CONCLUSION

While it is fair to say that not enough is known about how the purported antifascist revolutionaries of Antifa finance their efforts to sow civil unrest and the information currently available raises several serious questions about Antifa and its allies, it must be remembered that prior to 2020, few Americans knew what Antifa was. Now, however, the dearth of useful intelligence on how its activists and organizations pay for the now-routine assaults on police, government buildings, private property, and innocent civilians is poised to become a thing of the past. With federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies now interested in uncovering the truth about Antifa, information about the inner workings of the networks involved is bound to surface. And as it does, law enforcement must be prepared to follow that financial intelligence wherever it leads.

# Antifa: An International Insurgent Network

By J. Michael Waller

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For years, the FBI, Homeland Security, and the intelligence community watched the foreign connections of Antifa and suspected that it would import terrorism to the United States. Despite those concerns, Antifa's international connections remain largely unknown or unacknowledged. A look at Antifa as a network, and the Antifa movement as part of a broad front of related causes, provides indicators that the foreign ties are wide and deep as part of a "global resistance" movement that opposes fascism less than it opposes industrialized democracies.

## THE GLOBAL ANTIFA NETWORK

Antifa is a global, horizontally organized network of networks with no singular or personalistic leadership. It began in the 1980s in Germany as a revival of *Antifaschistische Aktion*—a movement that lasted briefly a half-century before, ostensibly to fight the Nazis, but which targeted Germany's mainstream parties and institutions.

The revived Antifa spread not to fight fascism, which was functionally extinct, but to fight NATO, capitalism, social democracy, and representative democracy in the United Kingdom, Sweden, France, the Netherlands, and other West European countries.<sup>130</sup> The British Anti-Fascist Action (Antifa or AFA) movement pioneered "no platform" or "deplatforming" in the mid-1980s to deny public platforms or communication venues to anyone they deemed fascist.<sup>131</sup><sup>132</sup> The deplatforming movement spread to the mainstream in the United States, where it ensconced itself in high-tech, big data, financial, and social media companies.<sup>133</sup> In recent years, Antifa and related "black bloc" movements have led protests and riots in the

Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Ukraine<sup>134</sup>, as well as in South America, with nationwide violent riots in Chile.<sup>135</sup>

All Antifa sections use variations of the same logo that features a stylized black banner and red banner side-by-side within a circle. The banners, modified from the original 1930s German movement, represent Antifa's dual ideologies of black for anarchism and red for communism.

## FOREIGN ORIGINS, INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE

In *Antifa: The Antifascist Handbook*, Mark Bray devotes two chapters covering 89 pages to Antifa's foreign origins and international presence. He describes Antifa's stress on historical roots and internationalism, or what Bray calls "the historical continuity between different eras of far-right violence and the many forms of collective self-defense that it has necessitated across the globe over the past century."<sup>136</sup>

The broad militant movement sweeping the United States in 2020, to include some of Antifa's partners, borrows heavily from foreign organizations, networks, governments, and at times, foreign intelligence services. Some of its key organizers and intellectual authors are either foreign nationals or American citizens trained abroad as professional revolutionaries and agitators.

These origins, networks, and connections are so complicated and esoteric that a single chapter cannot adequately cover them. By necessity, we will make a broad summary of them (referring to Antifa as a specific network)—including networks such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), which partners with Antifa in violent protests and rioting, and the broader movement that forms coalitions with Antifa/BLM nationwide. Where appropriate, this chapter will survey a representative individual who illustrates the leadership of the network as a whole.



## THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION SUSPECTED INTERNATIONAL TERROR TIES

Antifa became more organized and more militant during the last years of the Obama administration. In late 2015 or early 2016, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began investigating Antifa for links to foreign violent extremist groups. “The purpose of the investigation, according to the April 2016 assessment,” *Politico* reported, was “to determine whether the U.S.-based anarchists might start committing terrorist bombings like their counterparts in ‘foreign anarchist extremist movements’ in Greece, Italy and Mexico, possibly at the Republican and Democratic conventions that summer.”<sup>137</sup> Antifa was declaring war on America’s entire political system.

The title of the joint FBI–DHS assessment indicated the concern: *Baseline Comparison of U.S. and Foreign Anarchist Extremist Movements*.

This is a key point: the FBI and DHS presumed relatively early that Antifa in the United States was part of an international extremist network. The FBI, then under Director James Comey, and DHS, then led by Secretary Jeh Johnson, had been warning state and local officials for months that “leftist extremists known as ‘Antifa’ had become increasingly confrontational and dangerous, so much so that the Department of Homeland Security formally classified their activities as ‘domestic terrorist violence.’” The confidential 2016 joint FBI–DHS intelligence assessment cited these “anarchist elements” as “the primary instigators of violence at public rallies against a range of targets” and for attacking “police, government and political institutions, along with symbols of ‘the capitalist system,’ racism, social injustice and fascism.”<sup>138</sup>

The U.S. government under the Obama administration thus established that Antifa was not antifascist per se but fundamentally saw all American institutions and both main political parties as “fascist,” with fighting injustice as an ancillary concern. The main

targets were the United States government and economic and social systems.

Investigating the networks was a job for the entire U.S. intelligence community on a global scale.

A news report recounted the following about the FBI–DHS assessment:

By the spring of 2016, the anarchist groups had become so aggressive, including making armed attacks on individuals and small groups of perceived enemies, that federal officials launched a global investigation with the help of the U.S. intelligence community, according to the DHS and FBI assessment.<sup>139</sup>

That assessment said that major “intelligence gaps” handicapped the intelligence community’s ability to understand Antifa and related groups. Federal domestic and foreign intelligence agencies, the assessment said, “lack information to identify the travel patterns linking U.S. and foreign anarchist extremists.” A senior state law enforcement official who tracked Antifa in 2017 said, “There’s a lot more we don’t know about these groups than what we do know about them.”<sup>140</sup>

And so it is with this brief survey: Antifa’s loosely networked structure, its clandestine modes of operation, and the apparently poor track record that U.S. agencies have in understanding Antifa mean that our knowledge still suffers from major gaps. What we do know is that Antifa is a global violent extremist network that has evolved over generations.

## MILITANT INTERNATIONALISM

The Antifa/BLM networks reside in a much broader backdrop of militant internationalists whose current aged leaders, now well into their 70s, came of age as agitators and organizers during the civil rights and Vietnam War upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s. They included not only younger proteges of older strategists—such as Saul

Alinsky, whose *Rules for Radicals* would become a secular sacred text—but also harder core devotees of Fidel Castro’s regime in Cuba, Castro’s frenemy Ché Guevara, North Vietnamese Communist leader Ho Chi Minh and his Vietcong irregulars in the south, and even China’s Mao Tse-tung. At the same time, the baby boomer generation was experiencing racial, ethnic, sexual, and other cultural awakenings and assertions of independence and justice. Americans tend to think of the movements in a national context, but for those participating at the time, they were globalist, transcending national boundaries. They had built upon revolutionary generations before them.<sup>141</sup>

It is from this 1960s and 1970s’ upheaval that foreign governments intensified recruitment of Americans to become professional agitators and organizers, whether as independent actors or as fully recruited operatives. “Solidarity” was the word then, with the Cuban regime sponsoring Venceremos Brigades of young people to cut sugar cane, but whose real purpose was to assess, cultivate, indoctrinate, and recruit politically mobile and radical younger Americans to fight the United States from within.<sup>142</sup>

Separately, the Cuban Communist Party recruited the most militant African American protest leaders to introduce them to the “liberation” of Afro-Cuban culture under communism, indoctrinate them to understand that the United States was an inherently racist nation that could only be freed through Castro-style revolution, and cultivate and recruit them as terrorists and terror support cadres inside the United States.<sup>143</sup> The Cuban regime would later shelter these terrorists after killing police officers.<sup>144</sup> This, which occurred during and after Cuba’s export of revolutions to Africa, became the genesis of what would become the most extreme of the movements for police and prison reform, leading to the police and prison abolition campaigns that BLM brought into the mainstream in 2020.

The Soviet bloc in the 1970s feted key American movement leaders, providing some with awards, global networking opportunities, and even training and advanced academic degrees. East Germany and the Soviet Union took the lead, but as stagnant

Communist regimes, they failed to inspire. Of greater interests were supporting Third World revolutionary leaders: Ho Chi Minh and the Vietcong in Vietnam, the Palestine Liberation Organization in the Middle East, Mao Tse-tung of China,<sup>145</sup> and especially, the Sandinista National Liberation Front of Nicaragua that took power in 1979 and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front insurgents of El Salvador who coalesced in 1980.<sup>146</sup>

This militant internationalism manifested itself over the years before and since<sup>147</sup> as names and places changed: solidarity with Hamas, the armed wing of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood (the Muslim Brotherhood, overall, has a significant, if secondary, visible presence in the present unrest in the United States); the Foro de São Paulo, set up by the old Workers' Party government in Brazil under the direction of Cuba; and, with support from, the Bolivarian Hugo Chavez/Nicolás Maduro dictatorship in Venezuela.

Now, we step back to some ancient modern political history to find the common foreign origin of Antifa in the United States today.

#### COMMON ORIGIN: STALIN'S COMINTERN, HITLER'S GERMANY, SOVIET GERMANY

Different elements of the larger Antifa/BLM movement have their own independent roots and networks. Apart from being an import from Germany, Antifa is a revival of what at the time was a Soviet active measures operation from the 1930s. The original Antifa was a program of the German Communist Party (KPD), which was under the full control of Stalin's Communist International or Comintern.

This point is important, for in the view of Stalin's Comintern at the time, the best way to take over Germany was to destroy the country's fragile traditional mainstream—political parties, cultural symbols, private enterprise, and the church—and polarize society between the “fascists” and the “antifascists.”

Thus, with the rise of the Nazis, the KPD served as a Soviet tool to wipe out the German Social Democratic Party, a working-class democratic center-left party that the Communists considered their archrival.<sup>148</sup> *Antifaschistische Aktion*, or Antifa, emerged as a KPD front in 1932 to do the street fighting.

Therefore, despite its name, the original Antifa existed not to fight the Nazis first, but to fight them last.

[Antifa] existed for the explicit purpose of using street violence to disrupt the ability of Germany's political center—the democratic liberals, moderates, and conservatives—to politically organize during the waning days of the Weimar Republic, and to take the fight straight to the National Socialist or Nazi party.<sup>149</sup>

Antifa's red-and-black banners symbolized a brief Stalin-era policy for alignment between Soviet-controlled Communist movements and their black anarchist opposites to collapse mainstream societal institutions in order to polarize societies and set the circumstances for revolution. Later in the 1930s, the Comintern directed the Communists to align with anarchists in Spain to destroy traditional institutions during the Spanish Civil War. They recruited international brigades of volunteers to gain training and combat experiences to spread revolutions on returning to their home countries. Thousands of Americans participated in the brigades.<sup>150</sup>

The present-day Antifa movement emerged in West Germany in the 1980s as the Soviets ramped up a new active measures campaign to cause unrest within the NATO alliance and prevent the United States from modernizing its forces in what was then considered the prime land-based battlespace between free Western Europe and Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe.

The new Antifa revived the distinctive twin red-and-black banners of the Comintern Antifa from almost five decades before. This time, Antifa was not Marxist-Leninist in the pure sense, but "autonomist," an anarcho-Marxist ideology personified by Western

Europe's urban terrorists from the 1960s and '70s who were involved in kidnappings and assassinations of political and military figures.

Autonomism melded into parts of the broad new 1980s punk rock movement as a form of cultural protest. Punk counterculture spread underground into East Germany at the time, which the Communist rulers perceived as an internal security threat. The East German Stasi security service infiltrated and repressed punk groups and bands, keeping "fear and mistrust alive in the underground music scene by spreading the rumor that the Stasi was seeking to recruit punks." The Stasi was indeed recruiting not only to divide and repress the movement as an internal defensive measure but also to use punk rockers as agents of influence against the West. One Stasi-controlled punk band, the Firm, became a "minor success" in Western Europe.<sup>151</sup>

The Stasi thus exploited an existing cultural trend. In West Germany, as the new Antifa revived itself—with or without Stasi support, we have no conclusive evidence—Antifa and elements of punk counterculture shared the autonomist worldview. Antifa arose on the heels of West European urban terrorist organizations that did indeed have active Stasi support for attacks in West Germany, Italy, and other NATO countries.

The main West German terrorist group of the time, the Red Army Faction (RAF) or Baader-Meinhof Gang, received Stasi sanctuary, training, and operational support. So did the Red Brigades of Italy, who kidnapped and assassinated former Prime Minister Aldo Moro. The German welfare state funds Antifa, prompting the daughter of the RAF's Ulrike Meinhof to observe disapprovingly in the summer of 2020 that "Antifa is something like an official RAF, a terrorist group with money from the state under the guise of [fighting] against the right."<sup>152</sup>

When it landed in the United States in the 1980s, Antifa began as Anti-Racist Action, spreading in various American cities and then creating regional networks. Like Antifa in Germany, Anti-Racist Action aimed its recruitment at the punk rock counterculture and fought anyone they deemed "Nazi punks" (some punks, such as Sid Vicious,

wore Nazi emblems to be outrageous but professed no Nazi or fascist sympathies) out of the punk communities.<sup>153</sup> Antifa in the United States began as a countercultural movement more than a political one.

By this time, the United States had lost the Vietnam War, depriving the protest movement of the military draft that had animated it years earlier. Civil rights had been advancing for years, with rapid cultural change underway. Here marks a generational shift between the boomers of the Cold War and the present movement whose participants, in large part, were either too young to have remembered much of the Cold War, were born afterward, or simply embraced antisocial or socially hostile tendencies without the discipline and romanticism of Communists.

The post-Cold War shift nevertheless preserved common threads. The movement remained internationalist, transcending borders and targeting only democratic societies as racist or fascist. The extremist ideas of the 1970s had become mainstreamed nearly a half-century later. Individual people who pioneered new manifestations of extremism in the '70s remain active today, outliving many of the terrorist movements and regimes they had embraced. Because Antifa's racism-and-fascism-are-everywhere approach had a far broader appeal than Marxism-Leninism and cultural Marxism had, by the 2000s, penetrated society thoroughly through universities, entertainment, and the popular media, the Antifa/BLM movement shared a common cause with a more popular resonance mainstreamed with greater ease.

#### LINEAR DESCENT

Some foreign-trained radicals remained in the fight to the present day. Others inspired younger followers. One of the Cubanized militants of the 1970s, Susan Rosenberg, would become a career revolutionary and terrorist who helped convicted cop-killer Joanne Chesimard, a Black Liberation Army terrorist also known as Assata Shakur, escape prison and flee to Cuba. Rosenberg would later bomb

the United States Capitol. President Bill Clinton pardoned Rosenberg at the request of Congressman Jerold Nadler (D-NY) in 2001. Rosenberg continued her revolutionary activity—ultimately becoming vice chair of Thousand Currents, a major funder of the present-day Black Lives Matter Global Foundation.<sup>154</sup>

Alicia Garza cited Chesimard/Shakur in Cuba as one of her inspirations as a cofounder of BLM in the United States, indicating why elements of the BLM leadership not only justified the murders of police officers but also called for it.<sup>155</sup> “We are trained Marxists,” said fellow BLM cofounder Patrisse Cullors in a 2015 video. Under former Weather Underground terrorist member Eric Mann, Cullors was trained as part of a global “resistance” movement, or in the words of the training center itself, a movement to “focus Black and Latino communities with deep historical ties to the long history of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, pro-communist resistance to the U.S. empire.”<sup>156</sup>

#### CASE STUDY: ANGELA DAVIS

Just as it has exploited extreme right-wing movements in NATO countries to sow divisions, the Putin government has been using Antifa/BLM actions for the same purpose. The goal is to portray the United States as a racist, anarchist nation run by a repressive government, not only to discredit the United States worldwide but also to demoralize the American public and fill it with self-doubt about American values and the country’s place in the world. It has provided an international forum for the movements and for older Soviet-trained assets that have been intellectual or leaders for various elements of the broader Antifa/BLM movement.

One of the most notable individuals, though not known to be a member of Antifa or BLM, is Angela Davis. Davis is an important study for covert and overt foreign ties to today’s militant networks by virtue of her personal life experiences as an operator and her later life as an intellectual and social thought-leader. A survey of Davis’s career and



leadership does not typify Antifa/BLM leadership, but it does illustrate hostile foreign state sponsorship of certain intellectual authors of today's Antifa/BLM phenomenon.

Davis has fashioned herself as the intellectual leader of the basis of the BLM movement, having worked since the 1960s to build today's campaigns for defunding police, abolishing prisons, and championing the killers of police officers.

Communist groups ran an international campaign to free Davis—who, though having bought the murder weapons that her friends used to kill a California judge, was acquitted and freed.

Before Davis's arrest, in 1969, Cuban Communist Party leader Fidel Castro recognized Davis's promise and personally received her in Havana, meeting officially with her again in 1972.<sup>157</sup> Davis's receptions in Cuba, and cultivation by Cuban regime assets, strongly influenced her philosophy that socialism was the proper way to fight racism,<sup>158</sup> thus linking communism with antiracism militancy.

The Soviet Communist Party Central Committee invited Davis to Moscow for a 10-day visit after her release in 1972, when she received an honorary Ph.D. from Moscow State University<sup>159</sup> and, later, a Lenin Peace Prize.<sup>160</sup> Both honors were to credential Davis as an international Soviet political influence asset.

East Germany, the leading edge of the Soviet bloc's cultivation and training of violent extremists at the time showed early interest in Davis. It had been the first regime to embrace Davis's "martyr role" in fomenting extremism in the United States.<sup>161</sup> The East German government became one of Davis's "strongest international supporters":

State media issued constant reports. Members of the youth organizations sent her letters, postcards and pictures of sunflowers. Adults sent demands to President Richard Nixon and Gov. Ronald Reagan for her release.

Once acquitted, Ms. Davis went to speak in East Germany, where she received an honorary degree from the University of Leipzig, a

personal introduction from General Secretary Erich Honecker, and the Star of People's Friendship from Walter Ulbricht, Honecker's predecessor. In 1973 she led the U.S. delegation to East Berlin for the Communist World Festival of Youth and Students.<sup>162</sup>

Beatrice de Graaf, Director of the Department of History at Utrecht University and part of the Program on Extremism at the George Washington University, noted how Davis became central to the Soviet bloc active measures campaigns against the United States in the early 1970s:

In other parts of the socialist world, too, people worked additional shifts "for Angela Davis" and sent huge numbers of protest letters to the American Congress. The CIA recorded that, in 1971, at least five percent of the Soviet Russian propaganda efforts were devoted to the Davis case (as opposed to four percent in Indochina [during the Vietnam War]) and that the affair had become a rallying point of a "Soviet-manipulated international anti-U.S. campaign reminiscent of the orchestrated Communist Propaganda efforts made on behalf of the atomic spies, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg."<sup>163</sup>

Davis was not a passive participant in Soviet active measures campaigns. She became an active participant. The East German government provided Davis with residency and graduate study at Humboldt University in East Berlin. The university at that time was under the political control of the East German Socialist Unity Party (the East German Communist party) and its Stasi political police and intelligence service,<sup>164</sup> acting as a Soviet surrogate to train, assess, recruit, and credential foreign assets for return to their home countries.

Davis was viewed as a pliable extremist who joins others in sinking revolutionary and subversive roots in the United States. When the East German government invited Davis to a graduate degree in East Berlin, it was actively recruiting "guerrilla fighters in the 1960s and 1970s" and "taught how to hijack planes, plant bombs, stage kidnappings" and more. The Stasi destroyed nearly all its records of these actions during the collapse of East Germany in 1989.<sup>165</sup>

With her new East German Ph.D., Davis became a professor and, ultimately, the Director of Feminist Studies at the University of California-Santa Cruz where she developed the intellectual basis for the defunding of police departments and abolition of prisons, and actively defended revolutionary killers of police officers.<sup>166</sup>

Davis joined the old guard of the Communist Party USA, a Kremlin-controlled organization run through the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee's International Department as part of Moscow's global active measures strategy. She ran as Communist Party USA's vice president in 1980 and 1984 during the height of Soviet active measures against the United States but quit the party during the Soviet collapse of 1991. Stasi assets remained at large, some still under Russian control, but there has not been an effective accounting of them.

In 1994, after the Soviet collapse, Left groups in the United States brought in East German-trained operatives into their organizations, with Angela Davis working among them.<sup>167</sup> The Federal Republic of Germany's 2007 annual report on threats to the Constitution stated that an extremist political group called Die Linke ("the Left")<sup>168</sup> was building ties to radical socialist and Marxist-Leninist groups under its larger banner.

"Several major Die Linke leaders have been exposed as Stasi informers," including brothers Andre and Michael Brie, sons of the former East German Ambassador to China and North Korea, Horst Brie.<sup>169</sup> The brothers were trained in the USSR and East Germany, with Michael serving as a Stasi operative to spy on foreign students at Humboldt University.<sup>170</sup> A German tribunal found that "he was mainly involved in recruiting foreign students for socialist intelligence services."<sup>171</sup> Andre Brie was also found to have been a Stasi worker. Andre went to Chicago in 1994 as a founder of the Committees of Correspondence, an American Communist group modeled after the Brazilian Workers Party. Angela Davis was a speaker at the event. Another participant was Danny Davis (D-IL), now a congressman.<sup>172</sup> The Committees of Correspondence failed, but the networks remain.

Davis participated in the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests and the 2017 Women's March on Washington, considered the main precursors to the 2020 mass protests. The mobilizations attracted a broad spectrum of activists, marchers, and ordinary angry people but, like most organized movements, were organized by professional militant leadership.

The old East German connection is important to consider because the Stasi networks were never fully uprooted; there was no full accounting of its operations, members, and other human assets nor was it ever publicly learned how certain Stasi assets were transferred to, or assumed by, the Soviet KGB and its post-Soviet successor components. We can only infer by pulling pieces together. One of those pieces, an indicator with little context around it, is former Stasi networks remain alive along with their former Soviet handlers and how the former handlers continue to promote the networks. The most prominent of those handlers—as a 33-year-old KGB major supervising the Stasi in Dresden, East Germany, in 1985<sup>173</sup>—was future Russian President Vladimir Putin.

And so we find the Angela Davis connection, as the intellectual author of BLM and a supporter of the Antifa rioting, to emerge on Russia Today in June 2020 to speak about the movement and call for loyal cadres to penetrate the American political mainstream. RT touted Davis as “one of the most influential activists of the last century.”<sup>174</sup> For her part, Davis sees the present violent extremism movement in the United States as an international movement, or what she calls “the global wave of resistance.”<sup>175</sup>

Davis was always a heroic Kremlin figure. Putin recalled, “People of my generation remember a time when huge portraits of Angela Davis, a member of the U.S. Communist Party and an ardent fighter for the rights of African Americans, were on view around the Soviet Union.”<sup>176</sup>

## PALESTINIAN ROLE MODELS

Theoretical and practical organizers have borrowed from the Palestinian *intifada*, or uprising movement against Israel. The *intifada* is known for its mass gatherings of civilians—organized in coordination with paramilitary or terrorist command-and-control of secular and Islamist Palestinian movements, including Hamas.

“Palestine has taught us a great deal about resistance,” Angela Davis said on Russia’s RT channel in June 2020.

About the endurance of resistance, and we’ve learned a great deal about the prison-industrial complex by looking at Palestine and looking at all of the ways of [*sic*] which Palestine is experiencing the carceral technologies developed by the state of Israel. For a very long time, there have been links of solidarity between Palestinians on the ground and Black people who are struggling here in the U.S. When I myself was in jail, I received numerous solidarity messages from Palestinian political prisoners.<sup>177</sup>

## COMBAT IN SYRIA

Evidence indicates that Antifa or Antifa-related militants have received paramilitary training and insurgent combat experience in Syria. “Some of the Antifa activists have gone overseas to train and fight with fellow anarchist organizations, including two Turkey-based groups fighting the Islamic State [in Syria], according to interviews and internet postings,” *Politico* cited in 2017.<sup>178</sup> Some of these fighters received praise as heroes in American popular culture outlets.<sup>179</sup>

The Department of Homeland Security has reported that Antifa and allied activists were, in 2020, under investigation on suspicion of ties with terrorists in Syria. The DHS intelligence report stated, “Antifa is being analyzed under the 2019 DHS Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism (CT) and Targeted Violence.”<sup>180</sup> “The report details more than half a dozen people identified with various far-left causes who have personally visited Syria to fight alongside Kurdish

factions,” which include the People’s Defense Unit, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, and the Peshmerga.<sup>181</sup> The U.S. Customs and Border Service, according to the DHS report, stated, “Concerns about and interest in these individuals stem from the types of skills and motivations that may have developed during their time overseas in foreign conflicts.”<sup>182</sup>

## GERMANY’S WARNING

To understand Antifa and its broader movement free from the lenses of American politics, the German government is very helpful. German Interior Ministry reports, mandated by law, have proven a useful guide to understanding Antifa and its allies more broadly.<sup>183</sup> Because Antifa in Germany is generally more advanced than it is in the United States, the German reports are valuable to predict future Antifa networking and behavior. German domestic intelligence has a warning: Antifa and its allies are going to get more destructive and more violent.

“There is a change in the forms of action from mass militancy to clandestine small group actions,” according to a 2020 German Interior Ministry report. “The target selection of left-wing extremist attacks is shifting more and more often from an institutional level to a personal level. Serious physical injuries to the victims up to possible death are accepted with approval.” German analysts anticipated “the formation of terrorist structures in left-wing extremism appears possible under these conditions,” according to the report.<sup>184</sup>

The report allows us to draw parallels between how Antifa operates in Germany’s federal system of states and how it operates in the United States. “A high level of radicalization of the violence-oriented left-wing extremist scene is recognizable nationwide, but the development is not the same in all federal states,” the report said.

Following actions in German states can be helpful to apply to the federal system in America. “For Saxony, Hamburg and Berlin but also in Thuringia, Bavaria and Bremen there are indications that a small

part of the violence-oriented left-extremist scene is becoming increasingly radicalized,” according to the report. “In Leipzig in particular, a focus on the increasing radicalization of violent left-wing extremists has emerged.”<sup>185</sup>

German intelligence can measure radicalization to detect militant action. “Radicalization can currently be measured by two qualitative indicators: the change in acts and the change in the scene,” according to the report.

“Change in acts” refers to what the report calls

a change in the forms of action from mass militancy to clandestine small group actions. The target selection of left-wing extremist attacks is shifting more and more often from an institutional level to a personal level. Serious physical injuries to the victims up to possible death are accepted with approval.<sup>186</sup>

We can see parallels with the intensification of Antifa-related violence in Portland, Oregon, from protective gear to offensive small-scale, home-made, or improvised devices and then to destructive and deadly fireworks and firearms.

The German report further said,

Changes in the scene: In several federal states there are indications that clandestine small groups are developing within the violence-oriented left-wing extremist scene, commit their own acts and, due to an increasing willingness to use violence, act on their own.

Autonomous action is an Antifa hallmark, in which individual militants can operate freely and not necessarily under a conventional command-and-control, much as Al Qaeda and ISIS did in the Islamist sphere.

“In the context of the ‘defense of open spaces’ [autonomous zones] in the fight against urban restructuring and against political opponents—especially (alleged) right-wing extremists—the left-wing extremist scene increasingly seems to legitimize acts of high violence,” said the report, which placed the word “alleged” in parentheses. “The formation of terrorist structures in left-wing

extremism appears possible under these conditions,” the report added.

The German Interior Ministry is mindful of any white supremacist, fascist, or neo-Nazi activity and, since the establishment of the federal republic after World War II, has infiltrated, disrupted, and shut down extreme right-wing illegal networks. Its annual report, the *Verfassungsschutzbericht*, shows a consistent, even-handed approach against all extremists that threaten the German Constitution from Left and Right.

## CONCLUSION

The Antifa movement in the United States is of foreign origin, is networked internationally, and is targeted at representative democratic governments and their constitutional foundations. It uses the term “fascist” so broadly as to be useless and has fought very few real fascists at all. It is ideologically a hybrid of anarchism and Marxism.

Antifa has made common cause with individuals and organizations involved with, and under the control of, dictatorial foreign regimes. Its operatives function within a larger ideological political network of activists and operatives, some of whose leaders have been trained or otherwise backed by hostile foreign intelligence services, and in parallel with international terrorist organizations and armed insurgencies. Antifa has borrowed tactics from Cuban-backed armed clandestine organizations, radical Palestinian groups that waged the intifada, and Islamist movements ranging from the Muslim Brotherhood to Turkish-backed jihadis.

The Obama administration was so concerned about Antifa that it ordered an interagency investigation of the international network to search out suspected ties to terrorism. While the FBI has exhibited little knowledge publicly about Antifa’s foreign connection, public German domestic intelligence reports indicate substantial collection and analysis on this global network of networks.



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## UNMASKING ANTIFA: FIVE PERSPECTIVES ON A GROWING THREAT

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