

Solidarity, Inc. Part I: The Industrialisation of Solidarity

July 26, 2021



Ten years have passed since the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011. At the time, hopeful, young Arab activists such as myself had grown up only knowing political failure. We were raised watching the United States bomb Baghdad and Fallujah, and Israel doing the same in Gaza. We were raised to the images of Abu Ghraib and the helplessness of our Arab governments - without exception - that so often were too fearful to even say a word. When the uprisings broke out, the feeling of empowerment was one that we had never experienced. We looked forward to reaching out to Western activists and sharing our expertise and stories. When we found them, we were often elated at how much skepticism and opposition to their own governments they displayed. It wasn't only us!

But one uprising took longer than the others: Syria. And as Syria dragged on, it is there that even those of us who were non-Syrian, gradually learned that much of the solidarity some of us had received - notably on such issues as opposition to the Iraq war or solidarity with Palestine - was conditioned on far more considerations than simple internationalist solidarity. Furthermore, the skeptical analyses we heard around us in the West on the role of Western governments had taken on a life of its own. The analyses were often polar opposite to, and completely divorced from, our own 'anti-imperialist' emergent media and activist movements. Our understandings of the role of the West, too, were completely disconnected from one another, and in time, it became clear that many of our Western counterparts - those we laughed naively with and believed were interested in what we had to say, by virtue of our conversations on Iraq and Palestine - were not actually interested in hearing our experiences, or even our analyses of their governments' roles that may have differed from their own. They knew best. And with time, our confusion and ambiguity at their positions was replaced with clear-eyed clarity. It is in Syria that we were introduced to a new breed we had not known before: the teenage anti-imperialist.

But before we proceed to exploring the concept, let us a decade on from the Syrian uprising bring your attention to a few facts that you perhaps never knew.

1. To the knowledge of this author, no government in the history of war has used as much airpower inside its borders, including against residential centres, for as long, sustained, and uninterrupted a duration as the Assad regime.
2. The Western-backed Iraqi military – a product of the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq – has fought on the side of the Assad regime, and contributed the most ground combatants deployed at a single point in time than any other foreign country to its effort.
3. The US supported Iranian-backed militias on Syrian territory in an area in which the Syrian regime was accused of using chemical weapons.

These are only a few examples of some largely-unknown facts on Syria. And here the question arises: why are so many Western readers unaware of such facts? I can hear one response: “We are accustomed to often shallow coverage from mainstream media”. True – but considering the huge proliferation of skeptical alternative media in the past few years, can this alone explain the sheer gap in ‘translation’, and the huge disparity of the knowledge of such realities between Arab and Western audiences?

Enter the teenage anti-imperialist.

Introducing the ‘teenage anti-imperialist’ (not the ‘anti-imperialist teenager’)

To start with, the teenage anti-imperialist is **not a teenager**. Indeed, many politicised adolescents are amongst the most willing to partake in risks to bring about radical change, their sense of right, justice, and their passion are often a crucial part of activist and advocacy movements. They break from the mould that often surrounds them through their engagement with issues and causes that may be beyond the narrow concerns immediately directly affecting their lives. And while the analyses of young anti-imperialists in their teenage years may often have proved, with time, to have been revealed to simplistic or binary in certain ways – it is the strength of their unbridled empathy, ferocity of purpose, and stronger sense of justice – all features which are often less diluted by the passing of the years – that is crucial for their later development.

In other words, this piece is *not about the ‘anti-imperialist teenager’* – who has taken an avid interest in imperialism(s) and its histories and wants to play a part in making a better world. It is about **older, often professional, ‘anti-imperialists’ whose analysis is marked so heavily by the most self-centered and reactive (and reactionary) dynamics which are often associated in popular culture with teenage rebellion (though again, such a popular conception may be unfair as such features are by all means not unanimous amongst all adolescents)**. They possess the same identity conflict that informs a counter-conformity and contrarianism in their analyses and narratives. Yet while teenage rebellions are often time-limited – a short stage in life – and indeed, **while not all teenage rebellions are actually superficial, petulant, or contrarian** (many teenage rebellions are, in fact, righteous in nature and crucial for their character development) – the ‘teenage anti-imperialist’ in our formulation is the anti-imperialist who has adopted the most superficial and morally-vacuous aspects of ‘rebellion’ – which subsequently is not geographically restricted to their parents at home or time-restricted to the period of adolescence – but rooted in a same superficial, contrarian, identity politics that they then project over faraway conflicts.

So, to commence. The definition of imperialism, for the teenage anti-imperialist, has little to do with the actual policies of the state in question which is accused of being imperialist. It has to do effectively with the state’s racial or ethnic *identity*, and how it relates to their *own*. So long as the state in question is not Western – i.e. is not the ‘parent’ they are rebelling against – it could do almost anything. It matters little to the teenage anti-imperialist that Russia is the prime sponsor of the Western far-right, or that it is the prime source of Islamophobia around the world today through

its various diversified media channels. It matters little that the Assad regime - which the teenage anti-imperialist says is a victim - declares explicitly (in Assad's own words) that "terrorism will export itself to Europe through illegal migration". It matters little that such a regime supported Donald Trump's racist Muslim refugee ban (at the time when the regime was buoyed by Trump's initial election victory and his condemnation of the rebels), or that it hosts and welcomes Western far-right delegations in its capital. It matters little that it is a regime that constitutes the single biggest trojan horse of Islamophobia and the War on Terror that the region has perhaps ever seen. And it is of no consequence that that regime is a native client, in every sense of the word: politically, ideologically (this, crucially, crossed geopolitical divides), and militarily - of imperialism, simply because at this particular *moment* in time, the regime is rhetorically condemned by the (Western) establishment 'parent'.

Returning to some of the examples offered above, it may surprise readers to know that during the Syrian conflict the Iraqi military - the one installed by the 2003 US-led war which promised democracy - has fought in Syria on the same side as the Assad regime. In 2016, Iraqi Shia militias known as the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs) - who have been heavily relied upon by both Western states and Iran as some of the most effective Iraqi fighters in the campaign against ISIS - became legally part of the Iraqi military. Crucially however, the Iraqi PMUs did not only fight in Iraq - they also fought on the side of the Assad regime in Syria, from as early as 2013. A large bulk of these groups are a hybrid: both part of the Iraqi state but also extraterritorially loyal to Iran, with a long record of sectarian abuses in both Iraq and Syria. Over the years, human rights groups called on both Western governments and Iran to cease arms supplies to the PMUs, but to no avail. And although various Western governments were fully aware of the PMUs fighting for the Assad regime in Syria, they placed no conditionalities on Iraq to require their withdrawal from the other side of the border in order to receive support against ISIS - creating the somewhat ironic situation whereby the 'US-backed' Syrian opposition would face Iraqi military units armed with US weaponry and even tanks on the Syrian side of the border.

It may surprise readers even more, that the US-led coalition have also provided military support to Iranian-backed militias, including Hezbollah and the PMUs, inside Syria - most notably to capture the iconic city of Palmyra from ISIS (other reports have also taken place in Deir Ezzor). Later, the US instructed a small number of opposition groups that the Pentagon supported *exclusively* against ISIS (they were not permitted to fight the Assad regime) in the eastern Syrian desert, to surrender territories to such Iranian-backed militias encroaching into the area. When one such faction refused and clashed with an Iranian-backed militia in the desert, the US authorised Assad's airforce to bomb the opposition faction *that it supported* within a US-controlled zone. The faction was eventually expelled from the Pentagon's anti-ISIS coalition and allegedly threatened with US airstrikes.

The teenage anti-imperialist has never reported these realities. Such realities, not least that the US supported foreign Iranian-backed militias on Syrian territory - militias with a track record of abuse, both within Syria and elsewhere - should ordinarily be a matter of *genuine* anti-imperialist outrage. It is something that will surely, albeit belatedly, make it into the history books. But the reality was in fact that for the anti-imperialist, all these events weren't important: simply-speaking, they didn't make the anti-imperialist movie reel *cut*. In fact, even US officials who took to repeatedly lavishing praise on the Iraqi militias, who were simultaneously fighting for Assad in Syria (and despite their link with Qassem Soleimani - the same Soleimani that Donald Trump later killed) - even *that* didn't make the cut. For the teenage anti-imperialist instead distracts their audience with other fictions - that the US was *really* supporting Sunni jihadists, the likes of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Instead, it ended up mostly being the much-maligned 'liberal' human rights organisations who reported these realities.

The question here is obvious: why would proclaimed 'anti-imperialists' ignore such a clear example

of US complicity in human rights abuses? The answer is simple: it was too multilayered. The teenage anti-imperialist performs to a market, and requires a product that is graspable, catchy, and *quickly* disseminable to their consumers. The case of the Iraqi militias didn't quite fit the "good guy [Iran], bad guy [US]" movie narrative that they have spent years promoting- and which more importantly, they seek to quickly *sell*. Nuance doesn't make for convenient mass dissemination, and the consumerist and hobbyist politics of the solidarity industry requires easily-digestible narratives.

In other words, the intrinsically superficial nature of this 'ideology' - to the extent that it could be called one - lends itself to a superficial methodology in practice as well: one that fails to accurately relay the true policy of *even* Western imperialism - never mind those of other imperialisms in which the teenage anti-imperialist is not interested. So long as 'death to America' slogans continued to be nominally lifted every now and again in Tehran, it mattered little that Iraqi civilians remain stranded on the shores of the Euphrates, five years on from a 'liberation' brought to them by the same militias which refused to let them return home. Militias that received simultaneous US and Iranian backing. To put it simply, US crimes are *dropped* by the teenage anti-imperialist if they also potentially implicate US 'adversaries' that ruin the script of the theatrical exhibition on sale.

This was the degree of the superficial immaturity of the teenage anti-imperialist's hobbyist politics. Far from a thorn in the establishment parent's side, nothing made the establishment parent more content than its teenage offspring pointing crowds to alternative realities and caricature fictions. While the teenage anti-imperialist spends most of their time obfuscating whether chemical attacks really happened, or whether Syrians in anti-government areas gassed themselves dozens if not hundreds of times, the teenage anti-imperialist fails to notice when the Obama Administration appeared to dismiss continued chemical attacks when stating that chlorine was not "historically" a chemical weapon. Or when the Obama Administration blockaded Freedom of Information requests by journalists into the supposed surrender of Syria's chemical stockpile, years before the use of sarin gas indeed reemerged. Indeed, the teenage anti-imperialist did not even notice when the US-led Coalition supported a regime offensive in Palmyra within months after a regime chemical attack was reported in the same area.

For many of those who have closely followed many long years of detailed reporting from the ground, it is often surprising that the notion that US policy promoted the survival of the Assad regime is a minority understanding in so many Western - especially activist - spheres, despite being the norm within the corresponding Arab circles. Instead, the main promoted narratives in Western circles have been that the US has been engaged in a 'regime change' operation in the country. This was, of course, a narrative that completely excludes the millions of Syrians who demanded revolution - or 'regime change' for those not quite as worthy of the concept as their Western counterparts - as narrativial inconveniences and analytical irrelevancies. Millions whom none other than Bashar Al-Assad himself once acknowledged in a 2014 speech, declaring: "tens of thousands of Syrians have carried up arms against the state, and millions of Syrians are harbouring terrorists". Thus making his defenders who denied the existence of popular opposition against him, somewhat more defensive of Assad than Assad himself. Alternatively, some may admit that there were millions who called for revolution - but they were nonetheless proxies of Western interests.

Contrarian continuity

The teenage anti-imperialist is reactionary in both a superficial and *momentary* sense: superficial in that they are less interested in multilayered analyses than single-dimensional ones - through which they can rage against the hypocrisy of the establishment parent in the easiest, least time-consuming, and most marketable ways. Momentary, in that as long as there is a Western condemnation of a regime, it matters little whether the now suddenly-transformed 'anti-imperialist' regime was until yesterday collaborating with, and serving the interests of, the same imperialist powers. Nor does it

matter how we got here in the first place. It is both those core characteristics which make the teenage anti-imperialist vulnerable to an often intractable web of contradictions. As though simply taking the long way round, these contradictions - in a perverse sort of irony - leads them to in fact unwittingly possess much of the *same policy* as the establishment parent. This could be perhaps described as a 'contrarian continuity' - a somewhat surreal set of contradictions which reduces the teenage anti-imperialist's prescriptions to mere 360° reflections of those of the establishment parent they believed themselves to be opposing.

To offer some examples of such contrarian continuity, these could include the teenage anti-imperialist angrily demanding that the United States refuses to engage in regime change, when the United States has in fact for years been telling its 'allies' that its policy is not to bring about regime change. It could be proclaiming for years that the foremost problem in Syria are religious extremists, an understanding which has long been identical to that of US officials. It could be alleging that there are no moderate alternatives to the regime, when US officials had already claimed this years beforehand. It could be celebrating the calling off of a punitive strike following a chemical weapon, when the strike was called off as part of a deal proposed by Israel. It could be calling on regional states not to arm rebels, when US officials themselves had done so long before them. Indeed, when one puts the statements of some "anti-war" figures and teenage anti-imperialists side by side with those of US officials over the conflict, they would often be hard-pressed to distinguish them.

The reason for the contrarian continuity is that the teenage anti-imperialist in general doesn't substantively care about imperialist policy: they care about imperialist *posture*. This is precisely why the teenage anti-imperialist can condemn a good posture while ignoring a bad policy, and why they can unknowingly align with a bad policy because it is under a well-disguised contradicting posture. The teenage anti-imperialist does not question that the policy may not in fact be identical to the posture - and may even be the opposite of it. This is because the teenage anti-imperialist believes that as militaristic imperialists, the Western government's adversarial posture will never hide a more calculated or less adversarial policy in its relations with an abusive regime. The Western government is all powerful, and it does not need to hide less militaristic motives. It can disguise militarism underneath the surface with a government that it is not hostile to above the surface, but it cannot do the opposite. When the adversarialism rises to the surface, there is no questioning of its implications. This of course, again, is a juvenile understanding of politics, and ignores the role of political legitimation that is required by the Western power.

To put it simply, the teenage anti-imperialist fundamentally misreads imperialist policy. The exhibitionist nature of their act means that they expend much energy mired in the surface level, reacting negatively to basic and expected headlines that are widely available to their target audience - that a Western government, say, distances itself from an authoritarian 'third-world' regime. The teenage anti-imperialist, indeed in an archetypically adolescent manner, reacts as if this is a surprise or somehow unexpected. They cannot calmly accept that such condemnation in and of itself does not necessarily mean that the condemner is moral simply without taking into account other considerations (for instance, the Western government's simultaneous support of other dictatorships). They are unable to consider that there may be other reasons for such condemnation beyond the possible unfair demonisation of a political opponent (which is only one of many possibilities - others include political pressure from various constituencies, the PR need to cater to public opinion and appear as pro-democracy, etc.) - as was indeed the case with the upper echelons of various Arab Spring regimes that were cut loose by the West despite having enjoyed good and collaborative relations with them.

They are outraged that the Western government postures as moral by condemning another government that is immoral, and they want to show that they are angrier than anyone else about it -

and they do this in the most ostentatious, exaggerated manner possible. Their solution is to hit back at 'the opposite' – for instance in this case, to target the opposition to the dictatorship with which the Western government, again, was naturally expected to have affiliated itself with. This is where the counter-damage has to be done. Meanwhile, the condemned regime is exonerated as innocent, simply for being condemned – as if two 'bad' parties cannot be adversarial to one another. The teenage anti-imperialist does not seriously or objectively examine whether there is a serious basis for such condemnations originating from the natives over there; even where some half-hearted questions are posed to give the pretense of homework, their mind is already made up in advance.

Furthermore, a dominant presumption is that the value of Western public opinion counts for nothing in informing their governments' decision-making on foreign policy – often citing the failure of mass anti-war protests in the UK to stop the Blair Government's invasion of Iraq. Yet in 2013, the UK parliament did vote against an airstrike against the Assad regime in the basis of a lack of popular support following the experience of Iraq – while the Obama administration repeatedly cited public opinion in the aftermath Iraq to rebut criticisms by critics of his Administration's lack of a genuine commitment to remove Assad. Yet this did not mean that the population was 'anti-war' – as indeed was seen in the opposite UK vote in 2014 to intervene against ISIS, with significant popular support. In other words, a bulk of the British public were aware that Bush and Blair's invasion of Iraq was a mistake (though not all, and there remained many who supported the British action out of a sense of patriotism), and the anti-war movement played a part in conveying the realities of the occupation to Western audiences. Yet even where the public may have become more opposed to 'regime change' adventures, this did *not* necessarily mean that they were also opposed to the War on Terror more widely.

Syria was the victim of a false conflation of the War on Terror with 'regime change' – based on the experience of Iraq – when the War on Terror, even under the influence of the neoconservatives within the Bush Administration – continued to overwhelmingly support preservation of regional regimes, not regime-change, as a necessary cornerstone of the War on Terror. Iraq was an exceptional 'hybrid' within the War on Terror – a combination of both 'regime change' and 'targeting Islamists' – a regime – to be clear, a fascist one – that had exhibited outright hostility to (and went to war with) the US. The Iraqi regime's refusal to withdraw from Kuwait and choose a military confrontation with the United States stood in marked contrast with the Syrian regime's swift withdrawal from Lebanon following pressure from the Bush Administration in 2005, or the Iranian Government's support of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks.

The market of solidarity politics

The teenage anti-imperialist's politics is about themselves. It has little to do with internationalism or solidarity, and much to do with how the teenage anti-imperialist can posture to domestic audiences. It only recognises their unit – the West, the parent they are ashamed of – but which, in fact, often quietly carries out much of their preferences. No other unit exists. "My parents are the worst in the world", the teenage anti-imperialist repeats. On the surface, this statement is supposed to endear them to us natives, because we have indeed been victims of their parents. But we have been victims of other bad parents too. It is the epitome of self-centeredness to deny that there could be others who are "bad parents", as if there is a positive racialism and a negative one. As if there is no agency for good or for bad beyond the all-powerful Western establishment. (Except, of course, where some tenuous link is developed – for instance by the West 'supporting rebel jihadists'.)

Yet here's the thing: the teenage anti-imperialist also doesn't really care much if the West supports an authoritarian Arab regime or not. It cares if it does so *loudly*. This is the key. The level of analysis has to remain within a shallow surface-level, depth – because it is this surface-level analysis that reaches the domestic market of prospective solidarity politics consumers. It is the loud statements of

how the US thinks that Assad is bad and should resign that reaches the market, not the plethora of small-print statements that distinguish that while the US wants Assad to resign, it does not want him to *fall* or “go boom”. That distinguishes that while the US supports the opposition, it does not support a *military victory* by the opposition. That distinguishes between a transition from Assad, and a transition from the whole set of security apparatuses that underpins the Assad *regime*. Who has the time to decipher this, when Western mainstream media coverage continues to be so superficial?

Remember, for many – even those who are well-intentioned – solidarity politics can often be hobbyist in nature simply due to the lack of time available to devote to such issues. Of course, a genuine alternative media undertakes this task. But the alternative media of the teenage anti-imperialist is entirely self-interested, and is entirely *not* interested in deciphering what exists between the lines; it is interested in *performing* in reaction to what has been said loudly and what audiences have already heard. The teenage anti-imperialist adds their own embellishments, sure: but the starting point which defines the nature of such embellishments is what the establishment parent has originally and *loudly* said. This is the common ground that the performing teenage anti-imperialist has with their audience, and on which they build. What will be more easy to disseminate, and more importantly, attractive to sell? What is both the easier and sexier narrative?

Take the case of Syria: is it easier to state that “the US wanted regime change in Syria as in Iraq” – or (start taking a breath) that “the US wants the preservation of regime institutions in a post-Assad transition and would ideally like Assad to be pushed out through an intra-regime ‘reshuffling’ coup, as took place in Egypt and Yemen; however, if such a transition could not happen due to the regime’s internal power centres being unwilling to sacrifice Assad, then the US may be willing to prefer the regime – even with Assad at its head – to the prospect of a rebel military victory, which takes not only Assad out but the entire regime”? You can breathe. What flows off the tongue easier? “Another Iraq” was a far more marketable analogy than “another Egypt” or “another Yemen”. Indeed, for many of their Western audiences, how many know what the latter two even mean?

Besides, for the consumer, isn’t it more attractive anyway to state that the US is supporting *jihadists* than to say that the US wants some form of regime preservation? ‘Jihadists’ capture the popular imagination better than dictatorships; there are many examples of the US supporting dictatorships, but how many times can we ‘reveal’ that our governments are supporting ‘jihadists’ – ‘jihadists’ that can hurt *you*, o Western consumer. You’re certainly paying attention now.

The fact that the former has been the dominant narrative in Western alternative media, while the latter has been dominant in Arab alternative media, shows how potent the sway that the War on Terror continues to hold within the subconsciouses of Western audiences – even those critical of Western foreign policy. It was far too easy, not helped by shallow mainstream media coverage, to pull off the Islamophobic conflation that Assad’s army of teenage anti-imperialists largely succeeded in, by which a revolutionary with a beard was the same as an ISIS fighter with beard – because they were both Muslims and both had beards. This is where the teenage anti-imperialist baulks: revolution, what revolution? You didn’t have social injustice, inequality, or huge discrepancies in services, infrastructure, literacy, malnutrition, and even access to cheap water and medication, between favoured and unfavoured regions in Syria. You didn’t have construction workers, farmers, and labourers populating the ranks of the rebellion’s factions (well, at least they denied their existence rather than disparaged it like Obama). You didn’t have the upper class stick with the regime. None of that existed, the teenage anti-imperialist – unlikely to be able to name any of the country’s provinces (Damascus-excepted) – assures you. In Syria, they insist, the government ‘took care of you’.

Ultimately, the ‘revelation’ that the US supported ISIS proved far more of an ‘explosive’ one than that of the US supporting the survival of Assad (be it with nuance, as a second preference, or

otherwise). This is despite the fact that Assad has killed far, far greater numbers than ISIS - and has likely broken the record for any government's use of an airforce inside its borders for such a prolonged, intense, and continuous a campaign - a record made possible not only by Russian or Iranian support, but both specifically and more broadly by US policy - respectively through preventing third parties from providing anti-aircraft weaponry to the opposition, and through more generally opposing an military defeat of the Assad regime, notably through various operational red-lines on taking key areas, notably provincial capitals.

Crucially, the theatre on which the teenage anti-imperialist relies has to take as its starting point the loud and raucous exchange of statements. It's important to make this distinction because more nuanced statements that may actually contradict this conflict theatre also exist, but these constitute signalling for specialists - certainly not the hobbyist and exhibitionist teenage anti-imperialist, looking for a quick fix. For every five rote statements of the US condemning Russia or repeating how bad the Assad regime is, there will be a statement or two from either side expressing that the US and Russia actually view the conflict "fundamentally very similarly", and that neither side want a 'regime change'. Small-print has no place however within the theatrical, exhibitionist endeavour.

I hate you, mom. You never give me the foreign policy I want (except all of those times)

The teenage anti-imperialist always chides the hypocrisy of their establishment parent figure: "You say you support democracy, but why are you supporting all of these dictatorships, mom?" When grassroots democratic movements then appear however, and the parent does indeed offer it nominal support - as expected by its social peers (namely in this analogy, an international community viewing the events in a 21st century world of social media and instant mass communication) - the teenage anti-imperialist is not satisfied by the parent cutting off relations with the now-former dictator friend. The teenage anti-imperialist has to remain relevant. "The people want the downfall of the regime? Sounds like regime change to me! I thought you stopped regime change after Iraq, mom!"

Eventually the protests metamorphose into an armed rebellion: "I thought you said you're all for the War on Terror, so why are you supporting Muslim guys with beards taking up guns against the guy who says he's secular? You're such a hypocrite, mom!"

The parent starts bombing the Muslim guys with beards - in the case of Iraq, on the same side as other (but good Muslim guys with beards from the 'rival' sect) Muslim guys with beards, while maintaining a respectable public distance: "Why don't you say something nice about Iran if you're really serious about the [Sunni] jihadis, mom? Is it because they're mullahs and have beards? You're such an Islamophobe, mom!" Eventually, the parent actually does say quite a few nice things about Iran's guys in Iraq, but by this point the teenage anti-imperialist simply moves their demands back to demanding that something nice is said about the secular guy in Syria. Yet even there, even when the parent does eventually say something nice about the secular guy in Syria (after it procrastinated enough until it became more socially acceptable to do so), the teenage anti-imperialist pretends not to hear it.

In Syria, the parent starts bombing the bad Muslim guys with beads tacitly on the same side as the 'secular guy' - who is actually mainly backed by the same aforementioned group of (good) Muslim guys with beards. Seeking to conduct what could be best described as a 'separate-but-joint' endeavour, the establishment parent again seeks a respectable public distance - quietly telling the Syrian secular guy "I'll help, but keep it quiet". Only for the Syrian secular guy to publicly welcome the help and embarrass them. The establishment parent attempts to ignore the beaming grin on the Syrian secular guy's face and goes back to bombing their designated set of bad guys, while the Syrian secular guy goes to bomb his set (who he's now freer to hit harder - hence the big smile). But

the teenage anti-imperialist wants their establishment parent to be louder about it - which of course, would allow them to then condemn their establishment parent for supporting the dictator (who putting this show aside for a second, we all know is a pretty bad guy). Until then, the teenage anti-imperialist rails: "I don't believe you're actually bombing them. It's all fake. If it's real, why can't you just say something nice about the secular guy? This is all a show. You're such a [Sunni] jihadi supporter and hypocrite, mom!"

Equally, inaction is also used against the establishment parent, as such a poignant and over excitedly-premature case by the UK Stop the War Coalition shows - condemning the US 'failure' to support the Kurds in Kobane due to the Kurds being 'dispensable', presumably for their left-wing credentials (the US would eventually support the Kurds in Kobane and then expand Kurdish-controlled territory to include Arab-majority areas, providing them with almost a third of the country's territory; it didn't age well). The teenage anti-imperialist will also remind their audience how the US 'betrayed' the Shia uprising in the 1990s against the Saddam Hussein regime, when of course at the time the teenage anti-imperialist would have been pushing for precisely such a policy.