

The New Wave of War and Militarization in the Middle East

written by Roud Media Collective | July 22, 2025



Written by the editorial board of Roud Media Collective, representing a group of Iranian political activists in exile, the present text is part of a detailed analytical statement published (in Persian) on June 20th, analyzing the background and consequences of Israel's military invasion of Iran and its implications for reconsidering an alternative internationalist strategy.

General Challenges of Militarization in the Middle East for the Left

Regardless of the backgrounds and reasons behind Israel and the United States' military aggression against Iran, it is clear that this invasion has imposed a new "state of war" on the Middle East. The fragile ceasefire established after the "12-day war" cannot conceal the gravity and severity of this imposed situation. Apart from the impacts this war conditions may have on restructuring the power system in Iran and, more broadly, on the balance of forces in the Middle East, one thing is certain from the perspective of oppressed peoples' struggles: this war serves as the latest example of imperialist policies aimed at advancing the longstanding strategy of weakening/suppressing the political subjectivity of the oppressed in the Middle East and the Global South (the tragic case of Sudanese revolution is another prominent example). In an era where capitalism, in the true sense of the word, has conquered the entire world (both geographically and socially), and consequently, imperialist relations have become increasingly violent and widespread, events like the recent war cannot be analyzed outside the macro trends governing the world. From this perspective, if we consider the rise of the global neo-fascist wave and the expansion of the "global war regime" as responses by capitalism to the escalation of its chronic and multifaceted crises[1], then the Israeli war and genocide in Gaza along with the military invasion of Iran must also be understood within this broader historical framework.

Based on this viewpoint, we believe that strengthening an all-encompassing anti-capitalist internationalism in today's turbulent era requires taking steps toward transnational (and organized) cooperation against the intertwined waves of neo-fascism, war, and militarization (or the global war regime). However, based at least on the experience of the failure of leftist and progressive forces to effectively confront the Gaza war's atrocities, we have seen that establishing alternative structures for interconnected resistance or developing alternative internationalist strategies still faces significant obstacles. One major obstacle in this path is undoubtedly the notable growth of the campist approach (a state-centric understanding of imperialism) among a certain leftist spectrum over the past two decades—a tendency that has been reinforced and proliferated alongside the escalating tensions stemming from hegemonic rivalries among imperialist centers in the

contemporary multipolar world (such as proxy wars in the Middle East and Africa).

The increasing proliferation of the campist approach, coupled with the global crisis, created divisions within the leftist combat-lines, and has practically weakened the possibilities for anti-imperialist struggles and internationalist solidarity—including those against war and militarization. The contradictory manifestations and consequences of this phenomenon are especially evident in regions where imperialist relations and interventions have been more severe or their catastrophic outcomes have been long-standing historically (such as many Middle Eastern societies).

Perhaps the most recent manifestation of this phenomenon appeared during the Gaza war within the sphere of the Palestine solidarity movement. Here, the dominant discourse focused exclusively on the inhumane policies of the Israeli government and opposition to Western powers supporting it, ultimately disconnecting the Palestinian people's suffering from other ongoing tragedies in the Middle East. This discourse thus separated the shared and intertwined nature of Palestinian suffering from other mechanisms of domination and oppression inflicted upon the peoples of the Middle East. More concretely, while mainstream narratives propagate constructed polarities —such as Israel-Hamas, Israel-Iran, and USA-Iran— to demonize one side in favor of the other, the typical approach among leftists to resist these (dominant) narratives has been to defend the subordinate (demonized) side of each polarity. In doing so, this approach either ignores the inhumane nature and practices of the “subordinate side” (mainly from a pragmatic perspective) or justifies and rationalizes them through false anti-imperialism and/or decolonialist teachings. In both cases, it acknowledges—and departs from—the polarities constructed by mainstream narratives.

Currently, with the military invasion of Iran by Israel (and the United States) and its catastrophic consequences for the Middle East, this same logic is evident in many protest reactions by leftist groups, including the Iranian left[2]. This text aims, through a critical confrontation with such approaches, to demonstrate the necessity and potential of developing an alternative internationalist strategy based on “*The Third Way*[3].”

Intellectual Challenges in Reconstructing Internationalism Related to the Middle East

Even if the flames of the current war, ignited by Israel's military invasion, soon subside, its impact on the Middle East's future remains profoundly dangerous (set aside its immediate consequences[4]).

First of all, this invasion normalized (further) the logic and possibility of war (at least) in the Middle East, while suspending some critical international norms (such as no military attacks on nuclear facilities). No need to mention that this combination has devastating consequences for civilians. When viewed alongside the ongoing war and genocide in Gaza, this imposed situation reveals an unprecedented level of systematic dehumanization, mirroring the global rise of neo-fascism. This trajectory inevitably sows the seeds for horrific future tensions, primarily by accelerating the region's drift toward militarism and, consequently, authoritarianism.

Secondly, the direct impacts of this war, including the suppression of progressive forces, movements, and protests within Iran, create a political vacuum. This vacuum risks either the emergence and strengthening of reactionary alternatives, such as an imperialist top-down restructuring of political power, or the exacerbation of existing socio-political fractures due to intensified social crises and widespread insecurity. Such conditions could lead to confrontations among oppressed peoples, diverting them from collectively combating the foundations of the existing order, and potentially result in civil war and social collapse.

Thirdly, the war detrimentally impacts the future development of oppressed peoples' agency in Iran and the Middle East. This occurs by:

- Driving oppressed populations toward political passivity due to heightened economic and social insecurity, political repression, and security crackdowns.
- Fueling nationalism and discourses of national grandeur, thereby promoting racism and xenophobia, by reinforcing widespread fear and feelings of inferiority and powerlessness.
- Fostering Islamic fundamentalism, presenting it as Islam versus Judaism.
- Amplifying antisemitism by exposing a severe aspect of contemporary global injustice regarding the unchecked power and practices of the Israeli state. This is because Israel advances its aggressive and inhumane policies under the guise of representing world Jewry, acting beyond norms and deterrents with unconditional support from global powers.
- Ultimately, Israel's invasion of Iran, despite its guise of regional and ideological conflicts, fundamentally weakens the formation processes of class consciousness and anti-capitalist awareness/agency of the oppressed.

Our aim is to highlight internal challenges within the Middle Eastern left that impede the perspective and development of an alternative internationalist strategy (rather, lead to further political divergence). We contend that this dominant leftist perspective has fragmented and weakened the left's political forces in the region, thereby hindering progress. To provide clarity, we outline our own perspective, as an attempt to ground an alternative strategy we term "*The Third Way*".

From our perspective, the recent conflicts and political polarization within the Iranian and broader Middle Eastern left[5] largely stem from several conceptual ambiguities and challenges:

1. The intertwined nature of autocratic national capitalism with global capitalist relations.
2. The nature and functions of imperialist relations within contemporary capitalism in the Middle East.
3. How to simultaneously combat authoritarian and exploitative relations while also confronting imperialist dominance.
4. How to effectively address the crimes and dangers of colonial-Zionist expansionism.

On a concrete and historical level, the widespread divergence and polarization among the Middle Eastern left reflect the structural contradictions of the global order. In the contemporary world, the reproduction of capital accumulation—the dominant system's primary driver—necessitates both suppressing oppressed masses to curtail their agency and fueling militarized accumulation cycles. This process requires the reproduction of imperialist power structures and mechanisms at regional and national levels, primarily through the consolidation of autocratic powers reliant on militarism and despotism. Simultaneously, fluid yet inevitable conflicts of interest among core capitalist states (or imperialist centers) often manifest as regional tensions and proxy wars. However, since these regional tensions and proxy wars are shaped by specific historical and geopolitical factors[6] (including national, religious, and political divisions), the imperialist power mechanisms driving them often remain hidden.

In such a complex situation, conflicts among national actors or regional crises tend to seem independent and self-explanatory, rather than as systematic parts of the global order that shapes

them to reproduce its foundations. In other words, surface phenomena conceal underlying root causes (not to mention the obscuring function of mainstream political narratives). This applies directly to the roles of both the Israeli and Iranian states and their ongoing conflicts in shaping the current Middle Eastern order. Therefore, our challenging political and intellectual task is to identify the shared imperialist core of their seemingly contradictory functions, where the apparent forms of these conflicts mask the essential kinship of the political systems that manage them[7].

[1] The shared core of these responses lies in the management (and projection) of the intensified structural crises of capitalism through the deliberate instigation of geopolitical crises, aligned with imperialist interests and interventions. This strategy employed by contemporary capitalism to face its exacerbated structural crises has consequently facilitated the emergence of what is termed “disaster capitalism.”

[2] Regarding debates among Iranian leftists (Persian-language media), a condensed version of this approach is exemplified by I. Ganji’s essay. “*Six urgent points about the war against Iran*” (Akhabar Rooz, 28 Khordad 1404).

[3] We acknowledge that the term *The Third Way* is ambiguous due to its varied thematic references and contradictory backgrounds within the left movement and related political literature. We hope this text illustrates the necessity and historical rationale for its use.

[4] The immediate consequences already include civilian casualties, destruction of infrastructure and the natural environment, intensified political repression, and the exacerbation of patriarchal repression.

[5] The existing ideological and political polarizations in Iran’s public sphere mainly revolve around these contentious issues: the nature of the Iranian and Israeli regimes and their relationship; the nature of Islamic despotism and its connection to the global order; and the direction and means of a liberating political project (the transition process from the IR).

[6] These concrete-historical characteristics have mainly stemmed from the legacy of national and regional histories of colonization and imperialism, as well as the formation of modern nation-states, which were forcibly integrated into the global capitalist system. Many countries in the Global South still bear socio-political fissures rooted in this history of domination.

[7] Historically, two overlapping narratives obscured the fundamental kinship and similarities between Iran’s and Israel’s ruling systems: The IR’s anti-Zionist and anti-Western ideology, coupled with its long history of repression and fanaticism, fueled narratives of its adversaries, portraying the IR-system as isolated and alienated from the global order. Conversely, ongoing imperialist interventions in the Middle East, and Israel’s aggressive expansionism supported by Western powers, bolstered Iran’s anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist claims.