

Anti-Fascist Perspectives on Revolutionary Struggle in Myanmar

Dispatches from the Anti-Fascist Internationalist Front

International Solidarity for the AIF

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Combat Medic Baran

The AIF follows a long tradition of anti-fascist internationalism from Spain to Rojava, upon seeing the people's war in Myanmar internationalists took it upon themselves to form an internationalist front against the fascist government just as they did in 1936 and 2014. The revolution has brought together all sectors of society, urban and rural, Burmese majority and ethnic minorities, old and young.

For much of my time in Myanmar I have lived amongst the local comrades and learned much from them, their bravery knows no bounds and their hearts no fear. Before the revolution, our knowledge and professions in the medical field were used for profit, now perhaps they can be used for the benefit of the people. Like the comrades I met in Kurdistan, they are infinitely hospitable and welcoming, and selfless in their devotion to the revolution. I strive to be more like them every day, and to make proud all those who fell martyr fighting for this cause.

The sheer human cost of the fascist violence is apparent all over, many of the medics I am privileged to serve with left behind everything to join the revolution at immense risk to themselves and their families. Many are displaced, many towns and cities lay in ruin from fascist bombs, and the wounded never stop streaming in. In the course of the battles we've been a part of, dozens of comrades have come to the medic team with varying degrees of injuries. We treat all the comrades to the best of our ability, at hours of calm as well as under bombardment — to us it is a reality we accepted when we joined the revolution.

I have always seen the practice of medicine for the benefit of the people as revolutionary, taking inspiration of the noble revolutionaries like Che Guevara or Alina Sanchez. The medics, nurses, and doctors here seek to heal the wounds inflicted by the fascists and in a literal physical sense to right the wrongs wrought by 2021's attack on democracy. But above all, our goal is to communalize our knowledge with our comrades and to use this for the service of the people and the people's revolution.

Interview with Infantry Internationalist Hêlîn

Why did you travel to Myanmar to join the anti-fascist internationalist front?

I've followed the struggle in Burma against the military coup since it reignited 4 years ago, and saw similarities and felt connected to the struggle when people were using sticks, hard hats and slingshots to fight fascism in self organised groups that brought people together from across society. I saw the AIF as a chance to take part in that resistance which has transformed into a full scale revolution, which is closer than ever to toppling the historic power of the military, a power that has been present ever since the colonisation of Burma in the 1800s. If the movement for freedom wins here, we can use it as the inspiration in the fights back home against rapidly intensifying fascism.

How have you adapted to life in the AIF?

Since coming here and being a part of the unit I've been living communally with other Anti-fascists, waking up and training together every day and going on missions regularly. We brace together on the floor when airstrikes come, and joke about how inaccurate the pilots are. It's been a lesson in communal living and being a more active revolutionary than I can be back home. One of the comrades spoke of how we can act and think in a revolutionary way even when relaxing and doing dishes, and I've felt this as a change in my thinking which I hope to take this back home. You adapt very quickly to life near a frontline, shots ringing overhead become normal and airstrikes become routine although never comfortable.

As a European, walking around with a gun was strange but grabbing breakfast armed is now normal.

Have there been highs and lows?

I would say the highs have been being welcomed so warmly by so many of the local revolutionaries who are glad we're here fighting with them, as well as this delicious locally grown coffee, which hits hard after a busy period or before an intense mission. I'll be trying to find a way to take some coffee back with me when I leave.

For lows, obviously airstrikes are never fun but also rarely accurate either. Mainly though I obviously miss home, I chat with my comrades back home regularly and while I do miss friends, comrades and comforts of home I also feel like I'm on a different frequency here and will return to friends a significantly stronger revolutionary, Anti-fascist and person.

Anything you want to say to Anti-fascists in the west?

The main message I'd want to get across is that revolutionary change is real and possible: in Burma this revolution has been started, maintained and soon may be won entirely by normal people, most who had never fired a gun and many who'd barely left school. Whether it's revolutionary struggle in your country or going to support a revolution as an internationalist, it's all possible and you can take the steps yourself or with your comrades without waiting for permission from anyone.

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Feminist Perspectives on Revolutionary Struggle in Myanmar

Drone Specialist Rachel

The task of describing the experience and works of women in this revolution is a challenging one. I can of course speak to my own time here so far as a woman in our internationalist unit, and describe the many other incredible women I've fought with here, but I can't claim to have a complete picture on the matter: this revolution is vast and complex, and my experiences in the narrow sliver I've encountered to date cannot begin to encompass the range of paths women have walked in the many battles against the SAC.

There's no reason or need to sugar-coat things: Chinland, where we fight, is a socially conservative place with deeply entrenched gender roles, and the revolution here is no exception. The rigid post-colonial social structure here poses a constant threat and hindrance to the opportunities women can access, including within the forces opposing the SAC. (Note: the SAC, Tatmadaw, Junta, Dictatorship etc. are all terms for the same ruling force. It will be referred to as the SAC throughout).

The rights of women form a critical terrain of struggle here, and I'm honored to say this is a terrain in which we are rapidly gaining ground as an organization. All specialized trainings we have offered to our allies have required at minimum an equal gender split, a policy in which we have stood firm despite the excuses of local commanders. We may only be a small group, but our impact on the local fight is very broad due to the skills we bring. It's important that we approach this wider impact with intention, and so far I think we've done this quite well.

A strong ally in this push, and of our team overall, is one of the leaders of a friendly revolutionary army and political organization. Well respected by her peers and feared by the powerful military men she commands, she has encouraged and backed our insistence on gender equality in our works at every step.

In my own experience, teaching drone warfare classes to local soldiers, I've found that women in the revolution are eager to grasp at any tool, any literal or metaphorical weapon they can get their hands on in their struggle for equality. As a result, the women are consistently my best and most dedicated students. At the start of this training, many of the boys already had relevant experience and believed they might have a leg up, an easy ride through the course. Not only did this experience hamper them in some ways, requiring them to un-learn bad habits, it also laid the foundation for ego to hinder their ability to pick up the necessary skills.

By contrast, the girls have been voracious learners. Every opportunity they get, they utilize the simulators and training equipment to hone their technique, gathering in a huddle around whoever might be practicing at a given time. There is healthy competition between them, to be sure, but far more than this I see a deep camaraderie, a shared joy in any of their sisters' success.

A local woman, the leader of the Women's unit, has also integrated into our unit for all our recent combat missions. Acting as an infantry soldier, radio operator and translator, she fills a critical role on our team and has excelled on every mission we've executed to date. She's already experienced more enemy contact and "hot" combat than many soldiers in the force, and each time we go out I see the rapidly changing way the men interact with her.

The first mission, everywhere we went at the front the men gathered to stare at her, swapping muttered jokes I couldn't understand but which turned her face hard. Not long before this mission, a boy going to the front had taken her armor, and none of her superiors lifted a finger to stop it, so she uses mine. Her battle belt is a spare I had in my bag, her IFAK and pouches are all cobbled together from what we each weren't using or could give up.

The rifle she carries (a result of our insistence that she be armed) is a different story. The MA series rifles here in general are heavy, unreliable, and half-broken, a poor SAC-built clone of the already goofy Israeli Galil. Hers, though, is a status symbol: a short-barreled, lightweight variant with a stamped receiver and a folding carbon fiber stock, she carries it with pride and expertise and oh, how the boys look on with envy. Like all of her (and our) equipment, it stays in our unit armory. No soldier would dream of taking anything from us, the way they unfortunately feel emboldened to from the women's unit.

Since that first mission, she has played a pivotal role in multiple effective combat missions, using high tech equipment and modern tactics to strike at the enemy. She has been in the trenches, literally and figuratively, and you can see this in both the way she sees herself, and the way she is seen by others.

My dear hope is that as she and other women gain combat experience, confidence, and social capital through their training and service with us, they can act as the respected leaders the women in this revolution deserve and bring further change by their own hands. For now, these highly trained, highly capable women are seen by their peers as the exception. Only they can make their position the rule, and the standard, by which all revolutionary women are viewed.

Zooming out, or maybe in, this question has caused me to reflect on my own experience of gender, in a very familiar way. "Woman", while a critical part of who I am, and a lifelong part of my experience, is not my entirety. Being both intersex and nonbinary, I wonder if and how this revolution could serve to improve the rights and position of people like me throughout Chinland, throughout Burma.

I don't test the possibilities of this often in my daily life here. For many reasons, it's easiest and safest to simplify my position here down to just "woman". No need to further complicate an already challenging terrain of struggle. It's not solely for external or cynical reasons, either: here, in the hyper-masculine world of war, highlighting my fierce and dangerous femininity is just more important to me than exploring every detailed nuance of my gender.

In such a place of extremes, I can be deeply content to choose a limit of my being and embody it with severity.

While combat's intense polarity has helped to "binarize" my personal experience, Revolution and its shattering echoes can, for many, open new terrain in which to explore and occupy stranger and more unique forms of human experience. I see this in the way the women here interact with one another: Partially as a result of their newfound role and gender of "Soldier", they uphold a wider, more expansive form of womanhood than I saw available to the women in the villages and towns where peace allows the structures and guard-rails of daily life to remain calcified.

Here, at the front, in a battle already so fierce as to carry a badge of honor for those who take part in it, the lines are not so clear. Certainly, there remain forces, hidden or overt walls of propriety and place which urge the women into their expected behaviors. But these walls, like the walls of so many old brick structures here, are battered and beaten by bombs, bullet and the decay of an abandoned city.

With each air strike the SAC throw at us, each tragic pile of rubble where once proud buildings stood, so too do the social walls of "woman" fall away, providing newly open fields of fire from which the brave girls here can take aim at a brighter, more dangerous way of being.

I hope they find their targets.
Rachel, AIF

Interview with Women's Unit Commander Par Te

Why did you join the revolution?

Why I joined is because when I was in the village there was fighting between the SAC and Revolutionary armies and we had to flee the fighting to run away from the bullets, my younger brothers and sisters do not have any chance to run away from these dangerous things and I want this war to be finished so I joined this revolution to work as much as I could for that. Before I joined this revolution I can't imagine that things would be so difficult. After joining this

revolution I have faced some difficulties and desperate moments but I think about my younger brothers and sisters back in the village and I want them to have a good life after this revolution and I want them to get education so they can lead their village when the war is over. This is why I put this revolution first instead of sitting back at home.

How have you found life at the front compared to back home?

At home I can eat whatever I want when we have it and my family is around so I feel a lot more safe, I didn't think much back home I just stayed comfortable with my family. In revolution I have to take care of myself and my health because when I get sick no one will take care of me like back home, it's a huge difference between when I was back home and being a revolutionary. When I was back home I could get up whenever I like, in revolution I have to be disciplined and I have to follow orders when they're given, sometimes when it is very cold I don't want to get up early but I have to and I can't eat what I like. I have to do my work to support this revolution and I have to follow the discipline even though sometimes I don't want to work under the hot sun but I have to.

What do you hope for Chin state and Myanmar?

I expect the younger generation to have a good education so that they can think better, and they can live better in the future and I want them to have a simple life without hearing explosions or gunshots. I expect the new generation to lead us to better communities and a better environment.

What do you hope to do personally after the revolution?

Since I was young I wanted to be a doctor and help sick and unhealthy people and if I cannot do that now I want to be a nurse too, what I want is to help suffering people. Back home in the village we had very poor healthcare and the people who are sick don't have good medicine, so I want to be a doctor and help them.

What were you doing before the revolution?

I was studying and once the coup happened, I couldn't study anymore. I lived in an IDP camp and some other places here and there and I also had to work instead of studying to help my father to feed us.

How do you feel about the AIF?

To me, I respect AIF members a lot because they come from countries that are developed and have some freedoms, but they come here to fight alongside suffering people. Before anyone asked them, they came to participate in the revolution and I'm very thankful for them. They give us training on what they know, share their knowledge and capabilities and they develop our skills to fight the Junta. Being around them we have new experiences and new knowledge and skills which we never knew about, I've learnt many things from them. For example, not just military skills, but also how revolutionaries should live and act in our daily lives.

Any extra comments to readers?

I am very encouraged by AIF, whatever kind of difficulties we may face in our country, they come here to share our difficulties. When I feel down I look at AIF members, I know they came here to suffer with us, so we have to complete this revolution. Our country is being destroyed, and we have to work hard to get our freedom – we will take Myanmar back from the dictator and lead this to be a better country, we will build our country back even if it will be very difficult, we will do it and we will do our best. We need support from everyone, support from civilians and any friends and allies to do this, we will be encouraged and stronger if we work together hand in hand, please support the revolution in Myanmar as much as you can.

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