A Call for New Lines of Conflict:
Confronting the Second Trump Era

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A Call for New Lines of Conflict: Confronting the Second Trump Era

Panic has started to set in. Over the past month we have watched as jackbooted immigration agents raid restaurants and drag children's parents away. We have watched as the world's richest, and most arrogant, man is given free reign to remake the conditions of our lives without any ability to push back. Above all, we are watching a much more organized attempt to seize and hold onto power than vaguely planned out chaos of the first administration. For many, the situation feels hopeless.

In the midst of all of this, we have a Left that is rudderless. The traditional approaches that they have to offer, passive marches, rallies, symbolic civil disobedience, are wholly and completely insufficient for the moment we are facing. Yet, even with this being the case, even with their being no direction forward within their approaches, we see the new generation of aspiring movement celebrities falling over one another for followers and likes. The loudest voices are also the one's running in no particular direction, with no particular goal except "resistance," whatever that means within the narrow confines of activism.

It is imperative that we prevent this from happening, that we prevent a retreat back to the staid tactics of the antiwar movement and progressive organizations. If we are to have any chance to not just defend our communities but to go on the offensive against tyranny, it is going to look very different than the vision marketed in feel-good Instagram posts.

The game has changed, the terms are different, and the methods of mass activism, were not and, are not able to meet these changes. For us to start marking off new strategic lines of flight, we are going to need to understand exactly what it is that has changed.

Protest and the Liberal State

In our "normal" circumstance, where the liberal democratic state functions as such, it is an incredible form of political absorption. At its core liberal democracy exists as a political form, a container through which any statist politics can express itself. As Carl Schmitt[1] discusses, the liberal state functions as a medium through which politics can occur. Politics in the liberal democratic vision exists along the lines of rationalist discourse, and Parliament is the location of that discourse. All legitimate political action occurs in relation to this decision-making body and is an attempt to modify the functioning or decisions of that body.

Liberal democracy creates a political form, with content that varies based on political discourse Liberal democratic theory assume a political form in which politics becomes reduced to discourse. Rather than open factional conflict, the political would exist within the framing of representative bodies, in which electoral majorities carry political power. The wager within this form is that dissent is tolerated, and even necessary for political multiplicity, as long as all parties abide by this, and the state itself maintains sovereignty and organizational cohesion. The location of political power is displaced to the state

[1] Schmitt, C., & Kennedy, E. (2000). *The crisis of parliamentary democracy*. Mit Press. (Original work published 1923)

service without much of a clear focus, and to, in some cases, appoint people adversarial to the agencies they are appointed to run. A Justice Department at war with its own FBI is not one that is going to launch coordinated repression very effectively. A Department of Homeland Security that takes bombastic approaches to deportations and telegraphs its actions, through overt threats and announcements of impending raids, drives people into hiding, and actually lowers the number of deportations occurring[16]. Driving away federal employees is causing an atrophy of institutional knowledge, personal connections, and professional networks that keep the bureaucracy functioning.

At the same time that we are facing a state that is attempting to consolidate control, weaponize the state, and aim it at us, we are also facing a state that is degrading. The state is pulling back, from international aid to social services; from initiatives aimed at social reforms to address political conflicts. All of that is done now, and we are left with a state that is both weaponized, and weak, powerful but also hated by wide swaths of the public, which includes once committed bureaucrats and agents who were subject to arbitrary work termination. State legitimacy is taking a further, and variegated plunge. Part of our shift in strategic focus needs to be to map out where those weaknesses are appearing and learning how to exploit them.

This situation is anything but decided. As the state degrades, and as conflict expands, we do have the ability to overwhelm the state's ability to contain these conflicts, but only to the degree that we fundamentally realign our approach to resistance, and the strategic horizons it reaches toward.

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Most importantly, the strategic point of focus shifts from one that is based in abstraction, discourse, and massified politics to one that is based on immediacy, particularity, resiliency, and autonomy. The fundamental question is one of building the capacity for autonomy on an immediate level, and coordinating between initiatives, rather than attempting to build the largest organization with the most support over the broadest space. We need a politics of depth, of neighborhoods, of streets, and not of slogans and media campaigns. It is our task to create the conditions for this sort of resistance to manifest. That means fostering resilient networks of trust that can spawn a thousand initiatives within an ecosystem, and form the basis for the resistance to state actions that is necessary in this moment.

What we cannot do is fall back into patterns, into assumed approaches that are based on old models of political expression. This is not a call to leave the streets, far from it, but *it is a call to abandon the public realm of acceptable protest and complaint*. We need action in this moment, not words, and that involves organizing ourselves for material conflict with the state, using decentralized structures, practicing good operational security (opsec); always remembering that the state will try to destroy us if we are dangerous, and not careful, in what we do. We have to create environments that center and are based on this understanding of conflict with the state.

Above all, we need to resist the tendency of reacting to everything the administration does, every outrage, every insult. It is tempting to want to stay in that reactionary mode, constantly driven forward by a steady stream of anger. But, in a situation like this, that will blind us. We need to be looking, examining, at how these operations occur where we are. This means doing the research to understand the state and violent economic forces; trying to generate friction in their operation; and seizing and transforming the space left behind as the social services state retreats. That fight best happens where we live, in the communities we know and the streets we traverse frequently.

One of the realities of our current situation is that many of the actions taken by the administration thus far are going to result in a state that is weaker, less competent, and less organized than it had been. In agency after agency the approach seems to be to reduce operations, to blow holes in the career civil-

form, with the content that the state operates being variable, and with parties competing to capture the coercive policing apparatus to impose their respective program[2].

As a result, the liberal democratic state is able to grant concessions, both encouraging the protest form, which is firmly within control of the state, and decelerating the conflict that political dissent generates at the same time. Unlike ideological states, like North Korea, where the line between life and state of exception resides authoritarian agreement, in liberal democracy we cross over into the state of emergency, and are recognized as a legitimate threat to the state, only at the point when we refuse this discourse. Within liberal democratic forms disagreement is tolerated, and even encouraged, to the degree that it participates in reducing politics to discourse, which protest fundamentally does. Once that limit is exceeded, and either direct conflict emerges, or demands cannot be accommodated within the state form, the niceties of rights and civil liberties fall away, and these states revert to raw police violence just as much as those states termed dictatorships. As with counterinsurgency doctrine the "acceptable" practices, like protest, are encouraged while "unacceptable" practices, like concentrated direct action or insurrection, being ruthlessly suppressed[3].

In these "normal" circumstances those that do not identify as anarchists, who are inherently hostile to all states, can make an argument that protest achieves their minor reforms, and it actually does at times. This effectiveness, however, only exists in relation to a state that is premised on providing this space for conflict absorption. The primary problem in the present moment, is that this is no longer the state that exists within the US.

Over the past month the US state has dropped the niceties. The gentlemanly agreements that maintained US political norms are all gone, and the concept that the state is neutral has disappeared. Now, we are faced with consolidating central power, weak counter-institutions, and a state that is openly at war with those it deems political enemies.

[2] Schmitt, C., & Kennedy, E. (2000). *The crisis of parliamentary democracy*. Mit Press. (Original work published 1923)
[3] Williams, K. (2004). *Our enemies in blue : police and power in America*. Ak Press.

We can see this simply in the way the administration is conducting immigration raids. These raids, in the past, have been relatively bureaucratic processes, involving court hearings and some level of due process. Now, these raids occur as surprise attacks, where uniformed paramilitary police raid locations full of people, and drag some away in full sight of the public, with many being summarily deported without any judicial real process. It is a state where the normalities of law and process, in relation to immigration for example, have been replaced with a process of pure force.

In the early days of the second Trump term, we have watched a clear attempt to centralize power and impose dictatorial control over all elements of the state. They have stomped over well-established legal limitations;[4] have had Congress essentially give up their power to the executive;[5] and are openly talking about violating court orders.[6] The institutions that traditionally form a bulwark against dictatorship, largely due to an apolitical structure to civil service, are being taken over and gutted, weakening their ability to slow things down or force a change of course. We are not living in a dictatorship yet, the Trump administration have not been successful in this consolidation, but all of the moves are being made to move us in that direction.But, even if they are successful in this attempt, and they are capable of consolidating control over the state, that still does not guarantee them success. There is a vast distance between the legal capture of state institutions and actually consolidating political authority in real time and space. As I have said in the past, without police power politicians are just people making declarations; the state requires materialization of those declarations through policing, courts, prisons and welfare institutions.[7]

The situation we find ourselves in by the time of this writing, 12 February 2025, is one that is very much in flux and the outcomes uncertain. The situation is

networks, and figuring out how to defend your community, refusing the simplistic, generalized, media-centric pseudo-strategies provided by liberals and state socialists.

Our task is to make our communities and spaces a hostile territory for the state.

Every time the state comes into our spaces, they need to feel like they are being tracked, watched by a thousand eyes. Every time they come to extract information from people they need to meet a wall of silence. Every time they go to social media to map out our networks they need to leave with a wholly incomplete and completely distorted picture. Every time they come to take someone away, they need to feel like the entire space will take action against them. This raises the cost of coming into hostile areas, minimizes the number of operations that can be carried out, and greatly increases the political toll for these sorts of operations. Offensively, every act like this advances our autonomy from the state permanently, not just in relation to resisting this administration. If we cannot keep them out entirely, we need to make every one of their actions weaken their ability to continue.

We succeed to the degree that we are able to deny the state access to our spaces. That may mean organizing demonstrations, increasing tensions, and using that to mobilize massive horizontal networks. That could mean using your social center as a space to get people to converge, but then to encourage them to go out and blossom a thousand affinity groups and projects; the more of us there are, the more we move, the harder it is to map. That could mean building secure comms networks using meshnets[15]; getting trained on using long range ham radio links; learning how to prototype the new technologies of resistance. It is going to mean all of these things and more. If people are serious, and want to talk about resistance, then it means learning some skills, organizing and engaging in struggle.

[4] Rodriguez, S., Alfaro, M., & Tucker, B. (2025, January 28). *Live updates: Democrats question legality of Trump's freeze on all federal grants*. Washington Post; The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/01/28/trump-presidency-news/
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[6] Tait, R. (2025a, February 10). *Outrage after JD Vance claims judges are not allowed to check executive power*. The Guardian; The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/10/jd-vance-judges-trump
[7] Nomad, T (2014). *The Masters' Tools*. Repartee (LBC Books)

[15] Meshnets are networks in which all devices within range of one another form connections to one another. In traditional networks there is a central router that manages all routing of messages. Meshnets are able to reroute messages in case of a node in the network being removed or destroyed.
Community Resilience Through Mesh Networking. Mercatus Center. (n.d.). https://www.mercatus.org/students/economic-insights/expert-commentary/community-resilience-through-mesh-networking

The concept of "area denial," here, is one that comes from military science.[14] When you engage in area denial you are committing actions and creating a condition that makes movement through a space difficult, costly, or impossible. In our US political context, area denial would apply to the actions that we take to disrupt the ability of the state to function in the spaces we find ourselves. Area is not necessarily something physical. Communications, for example, are an area that can be accessed, through surveillance, or denied, through encryption. We can think of abstract social networks as areas, where persistent open-source intelligence gathering exists to map.

State activity in all of these areas can be disrupted and made more costly to try to undertake. Every time we use encryption we blind the state to communications, even if they are intercepted; in aggregate this fundamentally disrupts the gaze of the state. We can jam up the routes of circulation of goods and material by blocking roads, going on strike, and taking other actions to disrupt economic flows, especially as this administration rushes toward privatization. We can make our networks harder to map by organizing horizontally, rejecting the concept of mass organizations, and operating off social media. We can build communities that are opaque to the state by focusing on fostering a culture of trust and collective inoculation against repression.

To center area denial as a strategy means that, in everything we do, the intention is to create conditions that are increasingly hostile for the state, and that function to limit the ability of the state to project force. Unlike the protest form, which implies a relationship with the state and its discursive space (that now almost no longer exists). Centering area denial within political practice means to abandon that terrain. It is to meet the state where it is operating, on our streets, in our neighborhoods, within our communities. Remember what they say about occupiers and the failure to take over other people's land; we know this space better. It means we organize in ways that are resilient against repression, which are forms that are horizontal and illegible to the state. It means taking forensics seriously, learning about encryption, building parallel communications

developing rapidly, with the administration officially feeling out edges of their authority, identifying weak areas where they can push limits, and blatantly ignoring other branches of the state and mechanisms that could check executive power, or just outright firing employees[8] or attempting to dissolve agencies[9]. We have begun to cross over the abyss, but have only just begun that flight.

What we are experiencing, far from hyperbole in the press, is not the devolution of the state, it is the attempt to privatize "non-essential" elements and take control over the core functionality, policing. It is a campaign of state capture by the far right. If we are not just going to survive this period, but go on the offensive, we are going to have to do that with a new strategic horizon, one that attempts to, directly, weaken the ability of the state to function.
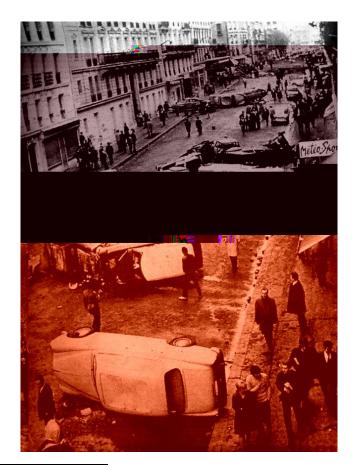
Outside of anarchist debates as to the effectiveness of protest as a form of political action in general[10], the recognition needs to be made that *we are no longer in the political scenario that protest assumes*. Unlike the periods of the past, where many have approached politics through the medium of protest, there is no interlocutor now. Though we have yet to see some sort of total seizure of power, we have witnessed a shift in the form of the state. No longer is there a state that discusses, or that attempts to mediate between positions for the sake

[14] Vershinin, A. (2020, March 31). *The Challenge of Dis-Integrating A2/AD Zone: How Emerging Technologies Are Shifting the Ba*. National Defense University Press. https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2106488/the-challenge-of-dis-integrating-a2ad-zone-how-emerging-technologies-are-shifti/

[8] *The significance of firing inspectors general: explained*. (n.d.). Campaign Legal Center. https://campaignlegal.org/update/significance-firing-inspectors-general-explained

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of political stability in the face of normalized exploitation, extractivism and war. Now, the state has emerged in its real form.[11] The mask has fallen away, and what we are experiencing is nothing short of a direct assault and open conflict.

The space that protest asserts exists as a grounding for its own legitimacy is no longer in existence. That changes everything! The state is forcing protest and riot to insurgency.

Area Denial as Strategic Horizon

At the point when the only possible engagement with the state is conflictual, the fundamental questions we ask ourselves need to shift from, "how do we change opinions around this thing" to "how do we map out state operations and identify intervention points."

As I have discussed at length in *What Is Policing?[12]* policing exists within a certain tension. On one hand the state only functions to the degree that policing operates in a space, to the degree that people listen to cops, or are governable. On the other hand, it is not materially possible to police all spaces all the time[13]. As a result, policing, and thus the operations of the state, are dependent on the ability to move and project force across space. Modern states, with modern transportation, communications, and networking capabilities, extend that reach through the use of vehicles for movement, trunked digital radio systems for wide area communications, and the use of surveillance to extend gaze, but even with these tools at their disposal, their gaze and presence covers little actual space. When combined with the cultural fear of police, the pervasive presence of police valorization (e.g. Hollywood 'Copaganda' films), and the concept that they "always get their guy," it forms a powerful, but vulnerable, apparatus.

In this shift in the dynamics of conflict with the state, the primary lines of conflict become lines of movement, communication, and visibility, the very lifelines of state power. This means embracing a strategy of area denial.

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[11] Foucault, M. (2003). *Society Must Be Defended : Lectures at the Collége De France, 1975-76*. London Penguin.

[12] Nomad, T (2014). *The Masters' Tools*. Repartee (LBC Books)
[13] One of the primary roles of paramilitaries in attempts to capture the state is that they are able to augment this projection of force, but at the risk of creating a power center external to, but competing with, the state itself. Evans, R. J. (2006). *The third reich in power*. Penguin Books.