



Soldiers of the People: Pan-Africanism and Bolivarianism in the Revolutionary Theories of Cabral and Chávez – Toward a Theory of Delinking and Armed Sovereignty in the Global South

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“We are armed militants and not militarists.”

-Amílcar Cabral

“We are the heirs of a past of struggle, of the free creation of our own history. The soldier of the people is not only a bearer of arms, but the bearer of the community’s conscience, forged in the crucible of national liberation and popular sovereignty.”

-Hugo Chávez

The concept of the armed people—not merely as an instrument of war but as a conscious collective actor—forms the intellectual core of both Amílcar Cabral’s and Hugo Chávez’s revolutionary thought. For each, the military was not a professional caste detached from the masses but a transformed institution, a school of political and ethical formation. Cabral and Chávez proposed and realized a civic-military continuum grounded in national culture and popular participation. Their revolutions, though born in distinct continents, converge on a single imperative: to humanize the act of war by aligning it with the moral and social objectives of national liberation.

This paper examines the revolutionary theories of Amílcar Cabral and Hugo Chávez through the lens of anti-imperialist struggle, focusing on their shared conception of the armed people as the foundation of socialist sovereignty. Against Eurocentric readings that domesticate their thought within humanist or post-Marxist frameworks, the paper situates both leaders in the lineage of Lenin’s analysis of imperialism and the Southern tradition of Marxism developed by Samir Amin, the Patnaiks, and Ali Kadri. Through comparative and interpretive analysis, it argues that the convergence of Pan-Africanism and Bolivarianism in their praxis represents not merely a moral or cultural revolution but a strategic project of delinking—material, epistemic, and military—from imperial domination. The study concludes that the theory of armed sovereignty in the South remains central to any viable path toward socialist internationalism today.

Amílcar Cabral and Hugo Chávez occupy distinct historical and geographical coordinates but converge on the revolutionary question of the army as the people in arms.



Their political practice, while forged in different terrains—Cabral in the anti-colonial liberation struggle of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, Chávez within the state apparatus of postcolonial Venezuela—articulates a common theoretical horizon: socialism grounded in the people’s armed capacity for self-determination. This study positions their theories within a broader Southern genealogy of revolutionary thought that understands political power not as the conquest of the state by elites but as the transformation of the state through the organized power of the masses.

Cabral: The Educated Rifle

In *The Weapon of Theory* (Havana, 1966), Cabral distilled his experience leading the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) into a philosophy of revolutionary pedagogy. The liberation struggle, he insisted, must “return to the source”—to the culture, history, and dignity of the people. Colonialism, in his analysis, was not only economic domination but also a cultural erasure, a systematic attempt to make Africans forget themselves. Hence, the rifle could not liberate without the restoration of consciousness.

Cabral’s guerrillas were instructed to teach reading, respect villagers, and participate in agricultural labor. Military discipline and cultural awakening were inseparable. He famously told his cadres: “Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told.” (Cabral, 1974: 72) These injunctions made the PAIGC’s armed struggle a moral enterprise—a kind of ethical warfare—that sought to reconstruct the human community devastated by colonial violence.

Thus, the soldier of the people in Cabral’s thought is not solely defined by firepower but by clarity of purpose. He embodies what Cabral called the “class suicide” of the petty bourgeoisie: the intellectual’s voluntary alignment with the people’s cause (1966: 15). In this sense, the gun becomes a paradoxical instrument of education. The act of fighting teaches not only courage but humility—the understanding that the liberation of one’s country is meaningless without the liberation of one’s self from the habits of domination.

Chávez: The Civic-Military Union

When Hugo Chávez began to articulate his Bolivarian Revolution after 1999, he turned to his own experience as a soldier within a deeply unequal society. His failed 1992 uprising, he later said, had been a “rebellion of dignity” (2013 <https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/7692/>) against the oligarchy that betrayed Simón



Bolívar’s dream of continental emancipation. Yet, instead of rejecting the military institution, Chávez sought to redefine it.

The civic-military union (*unidad cívico-militar*) became the cornerstone of his socialist vision. The army was to be transformed from a guardian of privilege into a participant in social reconstruction: building homes, distributing food, teaching literacy, and defending sovereignty. In this framework, every citizen became a potential soldier in the defense of the Bolivarian homeland—not through militarization of society, but through politicization of solidarity.

Chávez’s addresses in Banjul (2006) and Abuja (2006) expanded this model into the transcontinental dimension. Invoking Bolívar, Miranda, and the African independence leaders, he proclaimed that the South must unite and construct its own path. PetroSur, Banco del Sur, and TeleSur were not merely economic projects but weapons of integration—extensions of the civic-military logic into the domain of international cooperation. Just as Cabral’s fighters built schools in liberated zones, Chávez sought to build institutions of knowledge and communication that could defend the South from epistemic domination.

For Chavez, the *soldado del pueblo* was not limited to the barracks; she was the nurse, the teacher, the worker. The revolution’s success depended on the moral fiber of the people in uniform and the consciousness of the people without uniform (Chavez, 2006 <https://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/1728/>). This idea recasts the socialist struggle as a war of ideas and ethics—a war to reclaim sovereignty over culture and imagination.

Both Cabral and Chávez extend Marxism beyond its Eurocentric formulations. For Cabral, the revolution begins in the village; for Chávez, it culminates in the continental alliance. Yet the logic is continuous: liberation requires the armed awareness of the masses—the combination of physical defense and ideological clarity.

In both visions, the military is not the destroyer of the old order alone but the midwife of a new society. The “armed people” are not an army in the traditional sense but a self-organized community defending its dignity, producing, educating, and regenerating while it resists.

Thus, the soldier of the people becomes a metaphor for the total human being envisioned by both revolutionary thinkers: one who embodies courage and compassion, discipline and creativity, strategy and solidarity. The gun, in this reading, is both literal



and symbolic—a means of defending the revolution, but also a reminder that national liberation must be actively maintained. In this sense, the dialectic they articulate closely echoes Mao Zedong’s insistence on the permanence of revolutionary vigilance and his contention that political power ultimately emerges from—yet must remain accountable to—the armed participation of the people.

The convergence between Cabral’s guerrilla ethics and Chávez’s civic-military socialism reveals a coherent philosophy of revolutionary praxis: the unity of arms, ethics, and education. Both thinkers dissolve the dichotomy between war and peace, seeing them as moments within a single process of human emancipation. The soldier of the people thus stands at the heart of this comparative inquiry— an emblem of people’s self-organization, their refusal to remain subjects of western imperialism, and their determination to become history’s authors.

Imperialism and the Southern Framework of Liberation

To situate Cabral and Chávez within a coherent theoretical tradition, it is essential to frame their revolutionary thought within a Southern lineage of anti-imperialist materialism that begins with Lenin’s analysis of imperialism and is later developed by Samir Amin, Utsa and Prabhat Patnaik, and Ali Kadri. This genealogy provides a structural rather than metaphorical understanding of the world system, rejecting, as Capasso and Kadri demonstrate, spatialist or “spatio-temporal fix” readings of capitalism that have come to dominate Western Marxist geography (2023: 153-154). For Lenin, imperialism was not a mere expansionist tendency but the highest stage of capitalism, a phase in which monopoly and finance capital fuse, exporting capital abroad and partitioning the world into zones of domination and dependency. Imperialism thus appears not as an optional policy but as the necessary expression of monopoly capitalism, sustained by war, political coercion, and the global subordination of labor. (2023:153-154).

Samir Amin re-articulated this analysis for the post-colonial world, transforming Lenin’s stage theory into a structural law of global capitalism. His theory of the worldwide law of value explains that unequal exchange permanently transfers surplus from the periphery to the core, institutionalizing underdevelopment (2010). Against this, Amin called for “delinking”—not isolationism, but a conscious project of economic sovereignty that enables nations of the South to construct autonomous trajectories of accumulation. Utsa and Prabhat Patnaik extended this logic to the neoliberal era, arguing that imperialism now functions through income deflation: the deliberate suppression of wages and domestic demand in the periphery to guarantee a steady stream of cheap



commodities to the capitalist core (2021). In their view, imperialism’s economic logic remains identical to Lenin’s—an external constraint ensuring the reproduction of the North’s prosperity through the systematic impoverishment of the South.

Ali Kadri advances this same lineage by emphasizing the violent dimension of contemporary imperialism. In his latest work, “Accumulation of Waste: Essays on Inequality, Militarism, and Development,” Kadri demonstrates that imperialism is not only about the extraction of surplus but about the destruction of productive capacity in the South through war, sanctions, and de-development. Imperialism survives by denying the periphery the very means of production required for sovereignty. This renders military resistance, in its broadest sense, an indispensable dimension of economic and moral emancipation (Kadri, 2024).

Within this continuum, Cabral and Chávez emerge as theorists and practitioners of Southern delinking—not in the technocratic sense of economic policy, but as revolutionary projects uniting the political, cultural, and moral fronts of struggle against imperialism. Cabral’s concept of national liberation as re-Africanization and Chávez’s Bolivarian socialism both locate freedom in the capacity of the people to recover control over production, culture, and destiny. Their “soldiers of the people” embody precisely what Amin, Patnaik, and Kadri imply: a sovereign class power of the South, armed in both moral and material terms, standing against a system that enforces underdevelopment.

In his “Productive Sovereignty and Self-Reliance: Research Agendas and Hypothesis (2025), Max Ajl argues the importance of developing an analytic on the “imposition of a popular law of value” as the “freedom of the national will” (2025) in view of of the defensive armed struggle waged in the Arab Iranian region. This approach re-centers the South as the active subject of world history, rather than as a passive geography of crisis management, and restores to the theory of imperialism its Leninist meaning as the continuing structure of global domination.

Amílcar Cabral’s anticolonial thought offers a paradigmatic example of delinking in practice—rooting revolutionary struggle in “the concrete reality of our land” rather than imported models (Cabral 1960, quoted in Almada e Santos and Barros 2020, 1). As Aurora Almada e Santos and Víctor Barros note, Cabral’s originality lies in the way he “shaped a specific idea of anticolonial revolutionary resistance” that derived from the social and material conditions of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde rather than from the universalized frameworks of European Marxism (2020, 1). Cabral’s insistence on realism



—to be realists, as he said—prefigures later calls by Samir Amin and the Patnaiks for a “delinking” from the structures of global dependency and for an endogenous strategy of development rooted in the South’s own material base.

Within this Southern tradition of anti-imperialist materialism, the military question is not secondary or technical—it is central to the reproduction or overthrow of imperial power. In his For both Cabral and Chávez, the figure of the soldier of the people condenses this unity of the economic, political, and ethical dimensions of struggle. If, as Lenin insisted, imperialism sustains itself through war and coercion, then the people’s army becomes the organized negation of that coercion—the armed expression of delinking.

In Cabral’s framework, the liberation fighter is not a professional warrior but a politically conscious producer whose task is to defend and rebuild the material and moral fabric of a decolonized society. His “Weapon of Theory” declared that the revolutionary soldier must be both educator and worker for the war of liberation was inseparable from the creation of a new social consciousness.

Likewise, Chávez’s vision of the Bolivarian soldier as “a soldier of the people” redefined the armed forces as civic and moral agents within the construction of socialism, fusing defense of the nation with the protection of the poor and the transformation of the state. Understood through the lens of Amin’s delinking and Kadri’s war economy of imperialism, both leaders’ military concepts articulate the same principle: that liberation cannot endure without organized, sovereign power capable of resisting the material violence of imperialism. The army is not a separate caste but an extension of the people’s collective agency, tasked with safeguarding the productive and moral autonomy that imperialism seeks to destroy.

In this sense, Cabral’s guerrilla and Chávez’s Bolivarian soldier are not only military forms—they are historical embodiments of a Southern anti-imperialist socialism that insists that the struggle for humanity and dignity must be defended by all means, including armed and moral victory.

III. The People in Arms: Cabral, Chávez, and the Refunctioning of Force in the South

For Cabral, the armed struggle was never a purely military act but the materialization of political education and moral reawakening. His insistence that ‘the weapon of theory’ precedes the theory of weapons anchors the liberation army as a school



of the people. Similarly, Chávez reoriented the Venezuelan armed forces toward the Bolivarian ideal of civic-military unity—transforming the army from a repressive institution into an agent of popular sovereignty.

For both Cabral and Chávez, the revolutionary army was never conceived as a mere military apparatus but as an organ of popular education, political transformation, and moral reconstruction. The soldier was to be not only a combatant but also an educator, a community worker, and a bearer of ethical renewal. In this sense, both leaders inverted the traditional civil–military hierarchy: the army was to be of the people, not above them.

Their convergence lies in the political refunctioning of force: violence as constituent power, in Frantz Fanon’s sense—not as terror, but as creation. Here, the revolutionary army is not an aberration of democracy; it is democracy’s defense in a world where imperialism still defines the terrain of coercion.

Cabral’s *Weapon of Theory* (1966) and Chávez’s addresses to the African Union Summit (Banjul, 2006) and the South America–Africa Summit (Abuja, 2006) converge on this idea of the *soldado del pueblo*—a political subject whose consciousness fuses civic, cultural, and military functions. Cabral’s insistence that the guerrilla is above all an educator and Chávez’s description of the *soldado patriota* as one who serves before he commands embody a shared moral logic: revolutionary warfare is not destruction but reconstruction of the human and social fabric.

For Cabral, the political and military dimensions of revolution were inseparable. “The political and military leadership of the struggle is one: the political leadership,” he declared; “our fighters are defined as armed activists” (1983: 148). This unity of gun and consciousness reconfigures the very meaning of force. Violence becomes, in Frantz Fanon’s sense, a constituent power: the means through which the people re-create their historical agency. The gun, as Mao famously wrote, is the source of political power as it is for Cabral an instrument of pedagogy. For both, it is a defense of life, and a guarantee of the people’s collective sovereignty.

Patrick Chabal observes that “the ideology of the PAIGC relied essentially on its own history and not on foreign ideas or models. ... The aim was to bring about socialism, not merely the independence of the colonies” (1983, 108–9). Cabral’s military project was thus not a tactical adjunct to liberation but a process of re-educating the people through struggle—“revolution through consciousness,” as he put it.



This ethical-political dimension is underscored by Cabral’s belief that “national liberation is essentially a political problem,” whose conditions “belong to the sphere of morals” (Alumona, 2007:23). In this sense, the soldier of the people is not merely a militant but a moral subject—a synthesis of political educator, producer, and protector of the revolutionary process.

Chávez’s Bolivarian civic–military union reproduces this dialectic within a different geopolitical context: the Latin American front of the struggle for sovereignty. Both Cabral and Chávez thus transform the army from an apparatus of coercion into a vehicle of creation, a defense of the social order’s transformation rather than of its preservation.

Comparative Horizons: The Armed Struggle in the Global South as Praxis of Delinking

Across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, revolutionary armies in the Global South have emerged not merely as instruments of armed resistance but as organs of political economy—institutions that produce, educate, and defend the sovereignty of the oppressed. Their formation marks the continuity of Lenin’s thesis on imperialism with the material praxis of delinking, as theorized by Amin and his successors.

In China, Zedong’s formulation that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun defined the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) as the prototype of the people’s war: a mass-based force rooted in the peasantry and guided by political education (1927, 1938). Mao’s integration of the three inseparable tasks—fighting, production, and political work—transformed the PLA into a self-sustaining mechanism of revolutionary governance. The Chinese experience institutionalized the idea that the army is not an appendage of the state but the organized expression of the people’s will to transform society.

In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap adapted this principle to local conditions. The Viet Minh and later the People’s Army of Vietnam unified the war of liberation with agrarian reform, turning villages into liberated zones that prefigured socialist governance. Here, the armed struggle was the foundation of national reconstruction; political consciousness and productive labor were inseparable from military training.

In Cuba, Che Guevara advanced the foco theory—a small revolutionary nucleus that could ignite continental insurgency (1961). Though distinct in form, the Cuban model sustained the same conviction: that revolutionary warfare must cultivate moral and



ideological consciousness alongside military discipline. Che's conception of the new man paralleled Cabral's idea of the conscious combatant who transforms the self through collective struggle.

In the Philippines, José María Sison and the New People's Army (NPA) represent the most enduring continuation of Maoist people's war in the world. Established in 1969, the NPA has survived decades of U.S.-backed counterinsurgency by maintaining a disciplined synthesis of political education, mass base-building, and agrarian struggle (Sison, 1975/ 2014) The Philippine experience reaffirms that armed struggle, when integrated with the masses, becomes a continuous process of social reorganization and national assertion.

In South Asia, the Naxalite movement in India, as well as revolutionary groups in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Burma (Myanmar), adapted Marxist-Leninist-Maoist principles to specific contradictions of caste, ethnicity, and peasant dispossession (Bhushan, 2016, Kennedy and Puroshotam, 2012, , Lawote and Pahari, 2010). These movements extended the people's war framework to diverse terrains, demonstrating the elasticity of the revolutionary military form within the wider dialectic of dependency and sovereignty.

In West Asia, the Axis of Resistance—comprising Hezbollah (Lebanon), Hamas (Palestine), Ansar Allah (Yemen), and allied organizations—represents a contemporary configuration of anti-imperialist armed sovereignty (Ajl, 2025). Though shaped by different religious, national, and ideological traditions, these movements share a common orientation: resistance to U.S. and Zionist domination and defense of national and regional autonomy. Their military capacity—supported by logistical and political coordination with Iran and Syria—functions as both a deterrent and a guarantor of self-determination. In this sense, the Axis extends the historical project of the “soldiers of the people” into the contemporary struggle for the liberation of Palestine and the protection of the broader Global South from imperial coercion.

Each of these revolutionary formations, while distinct in origin, reveals a shared historical logic: the revolutionary army as the material form of delinking. It is through such institutions that popular sovereignty becomes enforceable—politically, economically, and militarily.

Across these diverse terrains—from the rice fields of Asia to the forests of Latin America and the deserts of West Asia—the revolutionary army has served as the infrastructure of delinking. Its function is not limited to armed confrontation but extends



to the goals of organization of production, redistribution of surplus, and defense of newly liberated social relations.

The comparative thread uniting these movements is their integration of the political, economic, and moral dimensions of struggle. In all these cases, the army is not a technocratic apparatus of violence but a political organism—a collective means to construct and protect sovereign social orders.

Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, and Sison each articulated this triadic principle of education, production, and defense as the foundation of revolutionary life. Likewise, the Axis of Resistance, under conditions of continuous siege, sustains the principle that armed sovereignty is essential to the survival of delinking in the age of imperial globalization. The ideological thread connecting these diverse formations is clear: independence is inseparable from the capacity to defend it.

Thus, the genealogy of people's armies across the Global South does not simply reflect theories of imperialism; it completes them. Where Lenin, Amin, and the Patnaiks analyzed the mechanisms of dependency, and Kadri exposed the imperial economy of waste and war, these armed movements constitute the practical negation of dependency itself. They embody the transition from critique to construction—the material enforcement of economic and political autonomy.

In this light, Cabral's and Chávez's "soldiers of the people" can be read not as isolated experiments but as contemporary expressions of a long and unfinished process: the collective endeavor of the South to achieve armed sovereignty as the precondition of delinking—a sovereign shield for the liberation of human life from the structural violence of imperialism.

Conclusion: Delinking and the Future of Armed Sovereignty

Both Cabral and Chávez spoke the language of humanism and morality, yet their meanings depart sharply from European 'humanist Marxism.' Their invocation of human dignity arose not from postwar philosophical debates but from the lived experience of dehumanization under colonialism and imperialism. For Cabral, to decolonize humanity was to restore to the people their agency as historical subjects; for Chávez, 'socialism of the 21st century' was a people-centered socialism, not an 'anti-Stalinist' abstraction. Their ethical discourse, grounded in collective struggle, redefines humanism as the capacity for solidarity and transformation, not as moral reform of socialism. As they understood, to humanize socialism is not to temper its revolutionary edge but to decolonize the very



category of the human. Thus, their projects illuminate how moral, political, and military dimensions converge in the anti-imperialist reassertion of sovereignty

Across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from Guinea-Bissau to Caracas, the question of the revolutionary army has been the question of sovereignty itself. For Cabral and Chávez, the soldiers of the people were never conceived as a separate caste of warriors but as the organized consciousness of a people in motion — the fusion of ethical, cultural, and political energies into a single project of liberation. Their revolutions transformed the military from an instrument of repression into a pedagogy of emancipation, re-rooting the armed struggle within the collective production of a new social order. In this, both thinkers dismantled the imperial separation between “political” and “military” spheres, revealing that the battlefield was only one of many terrains in which the colonized fought for the right to define their own humanity.

When Cabral spoke of the weapon of theory and Chávez invoked the soldiers of Bolívar, they affirmed a moral economy of struggle grounded in the unity of civic and armed power. This is the moral and humanist horizon of the South — not a derivative echo of post-Marxist debates in Europe, but a decolonial redefinition of the human as a being-in-struggle. Cabral’s “return to the source” and Chávez’s “socialism of the South” made the human the measure not of abstract virtue but of collective sovereignty. To humanize, for them, was to decolonize — to rebuild the material and moral foundations of life against the structural violence of US-led western imperialism.

In tracing these moral and military horizons, we return to the theoretical lineage that underpins their praxis — the continuum from Lenin to Amin, the Patnaiks, and Kadri. Lenin’s diagnosis of imperialism as the “highest stage of capitalism” exposed the mechanism by which political independence becomes meaningless without economic delinking from the circuits of global capital. Samir Amin made this delinking the cornerstone of a renewed anti-imperialist project: a conscious restructuring of the world economy through South–South solidarity and sovereign development. Prabhat and Utsa Patnaik extended the analysis through the concept of the drain of wealth, demonstrating that the periphery’s underdevelopment is the structural condition of the North’s prosperity. Ali Kadri advanced this further by locating the reproduction of imperial domination in the permanent militarization of the global South — the transformation of war itself into a modality of accumulation (2024).¹¹

Within this lineage, the soldiers of the people become the living institutions of delinking. They represent the refusal to submit to imperial dependency in any of its forms



— economic, epistemic, or military. When Cabral built cooperatives in liberated zones, when Chávez reorganized the Venezuelan army as a civic-military union, when Nasrallah, Sinwar, and the fighters of Yemen asserted the right to resist siege, they enacted what Amin called the sovereign control of history. These acts reveal that the material infrastructure of anti-imperialist solidarity — its geography of bases, supply chains, training grounds, and financial circuits — is inseparable from the moral infrastructure of collective will. As Syria’s experience within the Axis of Resistance demonstrates, the defense of logistical sovereignty is itself the defense of revolutionary continuity: without it, even the most heroic consciousness faces the crushing weight of imperial force.

Thus, to speak of Soldiers of the People is to name a praxis of delinking — the armed defense of sovereignty as the material and moral condition for the reconstitution of the South. The theory and practice of the people’s army, as articulated by Cabral’s liberation zones and Chávez’s Bolivarian militias must be read as an integral complement to the Southern theory of imperialism and delinking. From Lenin’s critique of finance capital to Samir Amin’s insistence on autonomous accumulation, the question of sovereignty has always carried a latent military dimension. Economic delinking, without armed capacity, remains vulnerable to recolonization through sanctions, coups, or proxy wars. Conversely, armed sovereignty without ideological clarity risks degenerating into militarism detached from the people. In bridging these contradictions, Cabral and Chávez demonstrate that the armed people—organized, conscious, and sovereign—embody the synthesis of political, economic, and moral struggle necessary for defeating imperialism and building socialism in the 21st century.

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