

## Audio file

[2025-03-07-booktalk-drevon.mp3](#)

## Transcript

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So I'm really delighted to be able to introduce my friend, my colleague, a senior analyst at the International Crisis Group. I've been given a written description of what Durham does, so I'm going to read it for beta. Joe focuses on the evolution of non state armed groups with a special emphasis on jihadis, especially how they become.

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Magic time. That's the official introduction. The unofficial introduction is that I and many people, this room I suspect are quite sceptical of people who work on Jihadi Muhammad.

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There is an industry of people who work on them and they don't intend to do the work very well. I think Jerome is one of the people who gives that whole field credibility.

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An unsteady school.

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OK.

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Jerome has interviewed hundreds of jihadi militants from the leaders of movements to the foot soldiers. I think Jordan has told me he's interviewed Ahmed the Shah.

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7 \* 8 times he's spent time in Idlib with shame. He's really one of the most empirical and most impressive scholars of this phenomenon, and we are absolutely delighted to be able to host him here.

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Yeah.

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So tonight, John's going to present his latest book from jihad to politics, how Syrian jihadi's embraced politics, published by Open Oxford University Press.

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The best press.

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I mean, I understand it's open source so you don't have to pay for it. Although is it on sale?

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And.

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On.

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Tonight, I don't know. No, but it's open source and it's available in most places, so if you prefer to have.

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So if you've got an Internet connection, you can get this band. So with that, let me welcome and ask you all to welcome our speakers tonight during German. Thank you so much.

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Thank you for the for the invitation and.

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The opportunity.

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So I guess that now she is becoming more interesting than just six months ago because of the recent events. So we're going to discuss how we got here and what's going on.

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Up to now, even even today's events. So when we look at it, when we look at conflicts during speaking.

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Jihadis are dominating most unconflicted worldwide, which was not the case in the in the past. In the path from trends National Liberation movement, leftist movements, nationalist movements. But over the years so-called jihadis, which are defined by those groups.

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That are opposed to Muslim states not implementing their conception of Islamic law as well as their foreign supporters have grown in in influence from their birth. Really.

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Egypt and Syria and the in the 1970s, they grew as they were travelling to Afghanistan by the by the end of the war against the Soviet Union.

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Then Al Qaeda Jenson Afghanistan reshaped somehow the evolution of of the jihadist and a common view of jihadis of jihadi devolution of other years is that they they have increasingly radicalised from their fight against.

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Single regime.

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As Egypt, Syria but later on Libya, Algeria and so on, they became more international, striking the US and their lives.

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But also there are modus operandi have become more radical in a.

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As well.

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As striking civilians in Algeria in the 1990s, being involved in in civil wars against other religious minorities, including against other Muslims disagreeing with them like against.

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The the whole war against Shia Muslims in Iraq in the.

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The 2000.

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And that leads to a common argument that the keep radicalised radicalising and that it might have to do something with their ideology. The ideology might be prone to this radicalization and that somehow it's one way trajectory.

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Only towards more and more violence and more radicalization the way it's been much epitomised by Islamic states that has become much more radical than any of its predecessors over the years. And so one of the questions.

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Can actually normalise? Can they reject the cycle of radicalization and can they become somehow normal characters and so?

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So the recent what we've seen in in service and show that another trajectory is possible, you've probably all seen on TV pictures of Ahmed Shah who was known before as Abu Mohammed Al Jolani, who was meeting with diplomats from the.

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Us European representative Mr Foreign affairs from France, from Germany and so on. If Mr Foreign affairs doing as well to to Davos, going to a conference in Paris, and so on. And so somehow this image shows that, yes, another trajectory might.

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Might be possible, but then the question is how?

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How did we get? How did we get here?

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What explains that? A group that used to be an affiliate or that used to be part of Islamic State in Iraq in 2011 and that then became the most successful al Qaeda affiliate worldwide? How has this book transformed to become what it is now as a government, as a new government of of Syria?

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In a quest somehow for international legitimacy, sending messages to the international community that can reach out to other communities, including Christian minorities, including.

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Jews and so on. So a few words about this was that so this is based on a book that Neil kindly mentioned before from jihad to politics that basically tries to respond to two main questions.

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First, why are our groups?

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That are that are that were affiliated to the GID trends. Why did they take over the leadership of the insurgency from 2011 and 12 on what?

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Second, why have they politicised over the years by normalising themselves and the interactions with other states with the population, with, with one another? So the book is available online and to some extent I will also speak about.

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Parts of the next book that should be coming by next July about HGS itself and its experience in governance in the inadip.

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So first, how did we get here? If we look at at Syria from 2012 and 15 for those of you who have followed those developments, there were hundreds of armed groups spreading out throughout the country. Some of the groups were more rigid than others, more radical. Some were more nationalist, some were very, very local.

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Why did the jihadists take over? Why there were not the majority in the in the beginning and then I will cover the two main groups and then the. So what did they normalise themselves and politicise as they change their relations to to other actors?

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Many of the common arguments are about French spots. Some would argue that jihadis receive more French support from outside, maybe from from independent entrepreneurs in the Gulf from foreign fighters or from a.

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Others would say it's because their ideology was more appealing than local fighters just fighting to protect the area, their village or form, or more appealing as well than more nationalist views.

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Of how to solve the the conflict so that was a common way of presenting armed groups before. So you have different actors from the jihadis on the top right to more like Islamist rebels, mainstream rebels to the to the local ones. And what I'm arguing is.

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Notification to understand this structure of the insurgency or which group are are which.

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Many because the groups are structured differently, they have different relations to their constituency, to their local community. They have also different structures, so managed to spread throughout the country. Some you can see just in one village and so on. So what we really have to understand.

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Is the beginning.

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How do you create an armed group? The reason for the same conflict are well, well understood. There is a regime that was exclusive that violently repressed popular demonstrations because initially it was not violent, it was not militarised.

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And that could not fully be reformed in a way the way we've seen. Finally, Tunisia and Egypt, where there was counterpowers to the, to the mainstream regime, there was the army. In Egypt, there was the army as well. In in Tunisia, that would somehow that could pressure the the authorities into making concessions. Even those happen to.

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Shortly.

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But that didn't happen in Salem. Everybody was around the regime, was quite cohesive and so could not really reform and change. So its main modus operandi was really harsh repression. But that does not tell you what exactly happens. So you have to understand the structure of the regime.

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Before 2011 and the impact on the development of an insurgency, because when you're faced with repression and if you want to take arms, what are you doing? Who are you going to to reach out? In many contexts you are reaching out to.

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Other groups that existed before you might reach out to.

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A wide social movement you might reach out to protest parties or the infrastructure of protest, or to student groups and so on. That's what we see in different different context. But there was no developed suicide in Syria, so you could not really rely on existing.

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Social movements or or structures with one exception that I'm going to to speak about it on. So basically most of the groups were extremely local.

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They gathered people from their neighbourhoods, groups of friends, families, clans, depending on the on the area in say and so on. So all the groups had to be very local because of the structure of TV site. And so why what makes the the Git different?

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The main difference between the.

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Already had some networks before they had networks before 2011, some of them, some of the local activists.

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Of the mutants participated in the war in Iraq, some of them participating to the first war against the Syrian regime in the late 70s, went abroad to Afghanistan, to the pace of conflict, and then came.

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And so there was an interconnected network of people that existed before 2011. So when they wanted to face the regime, similarly, they created their groups. Look.

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But then they reached out to to one another. They had similar views. They trusted one each other much more than the local groups could not really reach out outside of.

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Their village or on their places. So very quickly they managed to mobilise and to structure themselves. But then what we have to see as well is those jihadis. They believe in the general idea that we have to create static states, we have to implement.

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And selfie approach to Islam locally, but they did not disagree with Al Qaeda either because we had this before.

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Before the 2000s were much more divided for the much more diverse field than just al Qaeda and its affiliates. There were many criticisms of al Qaeda's monopoly over the jihadi movement in the 2000s. People are upset in this whole strategy of fighting the US. They thought we already wanted to create.

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What should we add? Other enemies? Some of us believed in the ideas in general, but then saw what happened in Iraq.

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Even after going to Iraq, that's so how they behave with civilians. This was a civil war against Shia Muslims and so on, evidently want that. But there was number space for them to create an alternative to create alternative groups that would still be jihadi but in a different context that would go back to what they claim, what the roots of jihad, which was jihad against the Soviet Union, which was for.

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Different in its non radicalism, in their, in their views, and in Syria specifically, those debates existed before the the 2000, 2011 revolution.

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Many of those were gaoled after going to Iraq or after supporting people going to Iraq. We're already debating these issues in prison. So basically, when the fighting started, they created armed groups like the local groups. But they also wanted to present something different. They did not want to replicate what happened in Iraq.

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They wanted to have a new a new model in a way, and that was reinforced by the the structure of the world, when.

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Let's look at the CNN Revolution was a revolution. You had to convince the mainstream population, which was Sunni Muslim. You had to convince them and mobilise them. You were no longer. You were not just fighting for an occupation like the US forces in Iraq. So you had to reach out to your own population.

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So they felt.

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The revolution is more than just a jihad, so we also have to make concessions and understand our environment in terms of how we behave that we've imposed our use of use over them.

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And if any of the questions very quickly arise once they manage to take over territories because the regime was unable to control all of sea at the same time, when people started to fight, what do you do with those new territories? You have dozens of factions.

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Fighting throughout throughout throughout the country and they are taking territory. What do you do? You have to collaborate with with one another. You have to find ways to stabilise the situation without fighting because if you fight we'll end up losing everything.

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But then there was also the impact of foreign states that impacted negatively those interactions between between armed groups. Many foreign states started to score different groups starting to impose their agenda, which created the anger. Some armed groups presented others for more support for being more well off for being able to pay the soldiers being able to.

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Healthcare and things like that. So that started to create some tensions even though not all the tensions were because of foreign support.

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And so that Jad is divided.

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Many people would look at is an extent, for example, and say the group is radical because of its theology.

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They are reading or they have a student reading to Islam that excommunicate Muslims that don't believe in their views that don't apply the proper creed. And that's a very common argument.

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But I will take it the other way around.

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Theodore G exists and theological explanations are rational evidence exists, but they're not the cause of the conflicts. The cause of the conflict between jihadis is diversity. When you have militant factions with ideas are very similar. Ultimately you're competing with one another.

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And what happens for Syrian jihadis who are identified with these ideologies? Is they were faced with two choices. The first one, which most of them chose, was to collaborate with one another.

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Thinking we can't just fight one another's, why? We have to make compromise. We have to find a way in between.

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Make some compromise locally. How do we rule the population? How do we even share scores of words once we start fighting the regime and Islamic State to the opposite direction? If I'm expected so no, the only way to survive is to say I'm the caliphate, because if I'm the caliphate, then I'm the only one legitimate for them. It's a strategy.

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And of the destination of the other groups, and so the little other groups, well, we're not a group anymore. We're a state. So you have to join us. Otherwise we're going to fight you. So we can't reconcile our views with your views. We have a state, you are of the groups but claiming that your state is an argument to justify yourself.

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It's not just.

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A theology that explains theology, rationalise basically monopolising approach to governance, and so the main group actually that started these efforts is not HS. The main group is called Ahasham for a long time it was a dominant group within the position.

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It's.

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Emerge very quickly as an alliance of many different local factions. You had many factions that would appear throughout the country that were connected to these pre-existing networks. Some of them went to Iraq, some didn't. Some were French fighters, some were just local activists or were linked somehow to the.

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Clinic cluster movement generally defines and so they understood that.

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Had to make.

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Confessions to one another and they have to unite. So they started a coordination effort with one another, which then institutionalised and created a stronger organisation, which means it became easier to join the group. If I am in a village, I have my my local armed group around me, both of friends and so on. I could give allegiance to a Hassan if I'm strong enough in terms of.

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Or men, or just military progress. I can negotiate a better integration. And so that was quite easy then to join this organisation.

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So in that sense, actually benefited from both those internal networks but also external, because many of those people who are connected abroad, so they could, they could know some religious preachers in the gulf or some militants or could give them money, training, weapons, et cetera. So all of that created a separate in a way.

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That boost boosted the an empowered the group over the years, and so if that sense was much more successful and free Sanam groups, that's where mostly local militias fighting for their own villages, but without much connections outside.

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The foreign fighters brigades many groups were composed only of foreign fighters from Morocco, from Chechnya, from wiggles in China, even from French citizens and so on, who could not really reach out to the population because they are not. Since it was different from Japanese pop, which?

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Was very selective. They thought of themselves as an elite metal organisation that would just recruit individuals and not full factions. But then when we think of the underposition, they didn't control only one area. They control different areas.

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Throughout the country.

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The controlled part of the South places in the suburbs of Damascus of Homs in the northwest, and so basically the only groups that managed to.

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Present everywhere were the extremists because of the nature of their networks.

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Because being involved in Iraq before are being connected to the same social movement was not linked to.

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Particular geography.

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So they managed to be present everywhere, and so they become the main alternative, which reinforced also their prominence within the insurgency.

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But if you followed.

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The trajectory of the same conflict.

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By the end of 2016, this is.

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Yeah.

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All the other areas were conquered by the by the regime alliance with Russia. What you had is Russia bombing those areas, the regime occasionally using chemical weapons, and even back troops from abroad, from Iraq, from Afghanistan, Pakistan and so on.

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Being the providing the the the the strength, the military strengths on the ground to take over these these places. So the opposition lost most of its areas of control and managed only to regroup in the northwest.

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And so your position.

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Down the position in general was faced with a was facing a deadlock. What do we do after that? If they lost the last place in the northwest, they lost everything and it's over. The regime is is winning. So the plality of groups, no faction that existed could not continue to exist this way. They had to find another way. So they had to unite.

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And ultimately.

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They thought we can all unite under a new group called HTS Haita Heshan, but then they divided. They did not manage to unite because for example, so we have to unite now with Turkey and we have to become both political and military.

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Jakarta also did not believe in that. They thought we only have to fight. We can't rely on foreign actors. We can be they can't be trusted.

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And other groups also thought Japan USA is listed internationally.

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The terrorist organisation by the Security Council by other states. So if we join them, we'll be listed as well. So what's the point? So it did.

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Work out, but it's still influenced Jabatan jabatan. That was the conference where Abu had Jilani at the time.

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Announced the sabbati without Qaeda because they could not let you remain without al Qaeda because the position would not unite with them. So they separate types with the organisation and then.

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They could not unite for the factions, but the United with much smaller groups and.

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Happens. Then you have basically two groups and they are localised fighting for the control of the Northwest you have ah, this large organisation that had adopted a very political approach to the conflicts in alliance with with Turkey. And then you had HGS and much smaller.

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That could not. That was not sustainable. You could not continue this way because there were too many contradictions between them. So ultimately they thought.

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It's just thought that attraction could be supported by other states, including Turkey, part of the international community to basically fight against it because HGS itself was listed by the Security Council. So ultimately the thought and HTS managed to impose itself over and then became.

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By 2019, the dominant actor ruling the the province.

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Then, once they were the province they went, they went after more globalist fighters who used to be part of Jabatanistan but who refused to make these compromises. So they went against Al Qaeda proponents, then Islamic State.

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Remnants that were starting to wrap here in the province and then against total foreign fighters, they didn't destroy them, but they imposed tax regulations over what they they were doing. But then the the issue with HS is they had to make compromise.

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Again, the only the the dominant actor within the province there were the factor rulings, the the population, and so there are main constrain now was Turkey. They understood that by themselves they could not protect the province, they had some military force on the ground.

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But if the regime and the Russians really bombed them, it would not defend themselves. The only way would actually to rely on Turkey. So even though they blamed the other groups in providing on Turkey ultimately understood the structural impediments to their own.

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And I thought that I have to rely on Turkey as well. And so they had to make concessions that will allow for the entrance of Turkish troops within northwest Syria. We set up observation points. I ultimately ended up with 12,000 soldiers protecting the.

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The the other issue became the issue of governance.

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They used to not really describe how they would rule the Syrian population. We knew there were Salafis that they believed in the idea of an Islamic State.

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It's applying Islamic law, but they never really went much further than that because the whole issue was to say we fight the regime and we see they didn't really have clear, identical tracks about what's building a state would mean and very much the faced new constraints.

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First, even though they were by then a large group, they still had very limited manpower because most of their fighters were fighters. They were not administrators or anything like that, so they could not actually were playing existing institutions.

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For example, you have thousands of moks. They couldn't put a new imam everywhere and those were not even accepted by local populations, so they could not replace all of.

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They also could not set up an emirate because they are now relying on Turkey, but also on fine countries. Foreign countries are providing limited assistance.

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And political backup in a way so they could not impose radical so-called protocols, radical views on the on the population. And so they position themselves in the in the.

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Then we position themselves politically, saying we're not the regime, another radicals because we clamp down on the radicals, but we are the only alternative. There is no other alternative than than us. But then the issue for them was to say we used to say that we want to implement systemic law, but what do we do now?

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The issue for them that what they realised with the Salafi approach to Islam is that it gives far more, far too much leeway to individual judges if the if a MiTo is very flexible, which means judges could implement rulings on a range of issues.

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To be aligned with our views.

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They could implement the Hadoop. For example the panel finishments and they did not want that. They didn't really believe in it, but also internationally. That would not really regulate well, so they could not have that. So they had to change the approach to Islamic law to be able to control.

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So even though they're opposed in the past, the codification of Islamic law, so to to codify what Islamic law stands for in terms of range of regulations, they accepted this idea, and then they discussed what does it mean to to codify Islamic law.

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I think you have to approach the first one with.

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All these examples.

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Or answer nada or jurisprudence and you create a whole framework. The way the Ottomans did in the past. But then there were lights that they couldn't do that they don't



have volema I don't really have the time to do it or something that priority. So what they did, they said we are we are going to rely on.

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So we are going to have new regulations and then there will be a magistrate that would say whether those regulations are compatible with Islamic law or not. And because they still wanted to have some control.

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The integrated figures were not Salafi, not jihadis, were mainstream, but ultimately for under their control. So basically the Fatwa Council manned up by the, you know, circle of Ahmed Shah, who'd stamp every every new regulation saying this is Islam. So we we accept.

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And also went back to the schools of jurisprudence to limit the influence of foreign preachers because he had he had different preachers influential for their troops. If they tried to rehabilitate as well.

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The matter the schools are Jewish students to make it more local and more accepted by the by the populations.

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And ultimately, they reached out.

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To to the Muslims, to Muslims who did were not Salafis, even Sufis, and saying now we can have like a mainstream approach.

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To to say that they're what they opposed of Sufism and Jabhat al Nusra was now acceptable because it's part of what the population believed, and they reached out to minorities and they did in different ways, further reached out to the Christians.

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And when we met the Christians many times in Italy, there are many issues was not hghs jihadism or whatsoever. It was property. Many of their properties had been occupied by refugees from elsewhere because, you know, many of the Christians had.

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Syria early on in the conflict. So when you had people who were coming back from those other areas?

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In the South, in Rota in Homs, and we're going to to eidlip well, they would just occupy any, any empty house that was not just about Christians or about Sunnis and so on just about.

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Anything that was available they would, they would occupy. And so for those Christians, I'm an issue with that. They just want to retrieve their property.

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And fight chest, but not that difficult to reach out to the questions because they could still say, you know, they are the people of the book, their rights have to be to be granted, even though there are constraints they would not rehabilitate their churches. For example, they would not allow for that process to be back again.

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Or for the best to be run, but they're still, but they're registered regression to our welcome. They could celebrate Christian, Christmas, Easter and so on.

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For.

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The Jews, it was a bit more difficult because the Christians had a statue in Islam, but the Jews. But the Jews did not. There are 4 Tabatha NIA. They were not mainstream Muslims.

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There are heretics in the way.

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But for that they still need to reach out to them. So they moved from the villages to the political. They, they said, look, the argument is to say the Druze did not fight against us the the welcomed refugees. And so there are citizens of this place. So we have to grant them their rights.

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Just because they had this particular positioning during the war and somehow the  
rageous arguments over them.

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Was.

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Disqualified because it was not what really mattered and what aligned with their  
immediate priorities.

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But that doesn't mean that the picture is very is all rosy. It's just when it was really  
needed, delegated a big part of governance, delegated education to foreign  
organisations, health again, to international NGOs.

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And also lots of lots of different fields to locals, but under their control, but they still  
remain dominant politically.

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Politically not to maintain their monopoly over who is representing the province and  
they would not allow for protesters. So somehow they became more religiously  
inclusive because they wanted to focus on the politics. So you could have you there  
could be much more diversity in the in the religious field as long as it did not contest HS.  
That was the compromise.

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Willing to say to have which is not that dissimilar to what we are, what we have seen for  
the past years in Saudi Arabia. A similarly there is an opening on the social front which  
just fronts, but politically it's remained to the end of the of the same man. So there was.

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A similarity in the in.

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Forgotten. So the root of the victory.

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You also that very quickly in December, HGS nodded. Arm groups had been preparing  
for a military battle that did not expect this military battle to take over the masters. That  
was never part of the plan.

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The purpose of the military battle was to free up some space around the idli province because for the past years you saw in.

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But many of the cities on the periphery of the province, Sarat and Mark Norman, et cetera, could host hundreds of thousands of inhabitants but had been emptied by the by the regime and by Russian.

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So the idea was to say, if we want to stabilise the situation in the long run, we need to take over these cities.

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Just because it will give us some breathing space to bring refugees from outside to stabilise the situation and to stabilise in a way, the situation for the population and so the idea was ultimately to take over these places.

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Potentially to take over Alec, but I thought Aleppo, we might be able to take it in.

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And so they had been preparing, but then very quickly they managed to take a level because the regime had been even much weaker than what they expected. And then they went all the way. Then the military leader was telling us a few weeks ago that he understood that wanted to caliphate, could take everything just because the regime was so weak in Aleppo, it could not defend itself.

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So then very quickly going to have I into homes and then in the in Damascus.

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There are two different.

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Aspects of this picture.

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Military and political military. What we've seen since 2020, basically since HGS imposed itself over the province, it engaged in a large military reconstruction. So before that you used to have different factions.

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Structured very differently with different abilities. Some were just a few guys defending a village, some were much more advanced with their training.

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But they used to collaborate, but the issue is that they would not send their best men for them to the front lines because, you know, if you're a strong group, you have a lot of resources. If you find the regimes and all your troops and you lose, then you know you're going to lose your position without the other groups. So it was not possible. So coordination was.

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Not not perfect by far. So what? H chess imposed its monopoly over governance in Egypt. They imposed the reconstruction of all the armed groups. So all the armed groups had to structure themselves based on the same, on the same internal organisation.

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With all the military specialisation from.

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Artillery to snipers to tanks, et cetera. That was like centralised, which was allocated in different areas.

00:31:29

They improved the professionalism of their troops, they created a Military Academy with 30 former officers from the from the regime to train people. But to become real soldiers, they understood they were not going to become a state army, but they could become closer to a state.

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And then they even added some more.

00:31:48

How to fight at night? The use of drones that we've seen increasingly and so on. So MiTo speaking, they're becoming much more efficient, much more professional. Their soldiers also were often new, so they were not necessary as ideological as in the past.

00:32:03

If you think about it, if in 20.

00:32:05

Four, you're a soldier.

00:32:07

In.

00:32:07

The ranks of HGS or other groups in your 22. It means you know in 2012 you were, you know, 10 years old. So you didn't go through the phase of Jabatano style. You didn't even know what was the regime. So those people who are newcomers, newcomers, really.

00:32:20

And so there are trained only on the technical abilities as opposed to being involved in villages debates the way they used to be in 1314, in when the competition with is much stronger so.

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A big part of the victory was the meet. I feel they were simply becoming better at it. While the regime on the sanctions, but also because of its inability to reform itself and to.

00:32:46

To try to.

00:32:48

You know, reform its militias where the balance of power was actually changing. The armed opposition was becoming in practise much stronger than than the regime. So the fact that they won't only in a in a week or so.

00:33:03

Is also an outcome of that, but what I would argue, and that this was not the only reason there was also political dimension, the whole governance project that HTS imposed, even though it was authoritarian, also played a critical role.

00:33:16

But it means that foreign countries.

00:33:19

Including in the West understood that.

00:33:22

Might not be their preferred actor, but might not be allies, but they're not Islamic State al Qaeda, so they understood that they would not pose the international original threat that Islamic State's post would have to cover.

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Or Mosul for example, or when the some of the Shiites in the Sahel tried to take over parts of of Mali on track, they understood it was a different dynamic. And so they did not go against. They didn't prevent it.

00:33:49

But.

00:33:49

The project also had on tour the front first. It's just actually reached out to the Russians, even though the Russians were bombing them a few weeks before, we're still bombing them as they were taking over Aleppo. They reached out to Russia.

00:34:02

The Mets.

00:34:03

Opponent at Turkey, they were saying look.

00:34:05

Might be a space for you in the post Assad, Syria. You should.

00:34:08

Stand.

00:34:08

The regime we can, we can also be part of the solution which will help, which means that the Russians understood that even though they had spotted the regime and had to victory by the end of 2016.

00:34:19

Download the regime was not helping itself. They were not reforming. They were becoming a narco state and the Russians thought we can't fight for the regime if the regime can't fight for itself. So the Russians abstained from preventing the the opposition victory.

00:34:36

But what HTS was doing with other religious communities, while not perfect, showed to other communities inside Syria that there will be a future for them. It's not an existential threat. They might. There will be a space for them. OK, not perfect.

00:34:51

But between that and the situation they were living under the regime under harsh economic hardship and the nature of the regime was continuing to be very oppressive and exploitive. They thought maybe it's alternative is worse, accept it. So the precautions played.

00:35:07

So now what? What? What do we have?

00:35:12

It's just quickly imposed itself, so it was not Victoria's.

00:35:17

But the factions. That's why people from the South went, people from the north of Aleppo, international army contributed, but ultimately it was HTS ultimate victory because they had, they were making the decision, they were putting the shots.

00:35:33

And once they arrived in the masculine chess to control the the presidential palace, there was no contest and even up to now.

00:35:39

If you commit factions who really disagreed, yes, who take them in the past? Who even tried to kill Ahmed Assara many times? They think it's just more able than them to eat. They accept that even though they don't like it, they accept this reality. So they are believing act.

00:35:56

They're engaged in real international outreach with with other countries, Gulf countries, Western countries, but.

00:36:04

It's still limited. The group remains listed by the UN Security Council for its previous association without paddling and mistakes. So even though it's organisation more than 10 years ago, it remains listed because there are many bureaucratic impediments considerations.



00:36:19

That prevent an easy deleting, but they're also under sanctions and not because of their own sanctions, only also because the sanctions states remains under sanctions, even though the regime has had disappeared, again because they are bureaucratic hurdles put at consideration.

00:36:34

Many Western countries think.

00:36:36

That sanctions also a way to impose leverage of the new government in Syria to impose what they think is an inclusion of bridges and ethnic minorities. Apartment of woman in very general terms, without being explicit about the.

00:36:54

The economic situation is catastrophic. As a consequence, there is no money. The bureaucracy is not being financed. The army is not being financed.

00:37:03

The economic costs are rising and people literally don't have the means of their own survival, so the situation is quite urgent in in that sense.

00:37:14

Also, I was writing that before, before today, but there was the potential is finding insurgency the issue as well is a big part of the, I mean all the security services of the regime and the army were disbanded.

00:37:28

Those people have lost their means of subsistence. They're also against the the new authorities, many of them negotiate.

00:37:35

Kids, their own rendition that should give back their weapon. They go to car. That's for the low level soldiers. Many others have not yet negotiated with the with the new government and many of them feel also that they have been excluded by by the new authorities.

00:37:51

And the new potential insurgency is also based on that. On the absence of Htss connection to the Arabic community trying to reach out to.

00:38:00

Lots of them. Good, but not to share like.

00:38:02

The regime 'cause you don't.

00:38:03

Manila weeds form the base of the regime of the all the.

00:38:06

Where the.

00:38:07

Regime of them, also oppressed by and so on, but it's yet not yet have a good understanding of this community. Which is it will have to reach out to them as well to prevent further deterioration of the situation.

00:38:18

And then the last question is the unification of of all of Syria. Syria remains divided, so a big part is under control of the new government, like IHS, not.

00:38:28

One groups.

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But there is attention in the east. There is still the Kurdish led Kurdish led.

00:38:35

Part of the country.

00:38:37

The government has been involved in negotiations with them. The idea is to say you have to come back to the government, you have to dismantle your military infrastructures. While the SDF wants to protect whatever they can, they've developed their autonomy there.

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Quite independent administration for the past. For the past decade is also with Western support, mostly from the.

00:39:00

Us they want to keep that them to be able to keep their military.

00:39:03

Intact, which for.

00:39:04

Instance. The reason the government cannot really accept so the government is trying to unify all these area of groups and even though it's the dominant factor, it's not such a powerful actor.

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It had 30,000 soldiers before taking over Damascus. Now it has doubled its number of soldiers up to 60,000. But I don't think that.

00:39:24

Face an insurgency.

00:39:28

In against some former regime supporters that can impose security everywhere and that you can also potentially confront the FDF. So it's a quite dense, dense situation. That is a situation in which we are now and.

00:39:43

It's the end of the presentation, so if.

00:39:44

Have any questions about?

00:39:45

Book about past development about current situation.

00:39:49

Please feel free.

00:39:58

That's great. Thank you so much, jerem. Great. So let me start, can you I've.

00:40:04

Wanted to know the answer to this question so there is a long standing explanation about the beginning of the Civil Revolution, when it's still in.

00:40:12

There heartwarming people power stage before it telescopes into something more armed civil war like the Bashar, opens the prisons and releases jihadis, maybe as a means of of discrediting the opposition. Does that happen? And if it does, what role do these?

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Individuals playing what comes later.

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That's very contentious question, but I think.

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I think that's not the reason why there are released. I mean reality is that the quote UN quote worst prisoners were not released by the regime and reality that most of these individuals had been sentenced to a few years in prison only.

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And had to be released even before 2011. And so by saying no, they had to be to be released and initially Bashar Assad did not see them as an immediate threat. A big part of the motive.

00:41:04

I thought I wanted to also free the prisons to bring more people in because ultimately it's unlimited. That much people can gaol immediately. And so I said, who wanted to actually think those people were a past threat? But we have to gaol all the activists and the protesters and so on. They are the most immediate threat.

00:41:22

But then, most of these individuals obviously then.

00:41:27

The group that was starting to form but the jihadi group that were forming on the ground were not formed by people in prison, but people were freed from prison, boosted basically their their role because they're coming from everywhere in Syria. So once they would come back to the community, they would recruit locally. But they also because they were gaoled often for supporting the war in Iraq, that means.

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That the new people from Iraq they had access to logistics to finance, to also just.

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Know how that they knew how to create IEDs, storm checkpoints and things like that. So they're reinforced the mitigation of the of the pricing but did not 'cause.

00:42:00

Second question, I'm gonna abuse my power. What is the relationship now between HTS and foreign fighters? So I'm thinking here of Ahmed Mansour, Egyptian member of HTS, who in January he he was the kind of.

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The.

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Hashtag it's your turn's coming soon to to CC.

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He's now subsequently been disappeared. Does this tell us something about the status of these?

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Fighters now.

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Yeah, basically the steps of foreign fighters have changed. When HS was in power, if you look at it, there are.

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Phases.

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The large, large majority of the foreign fighters joined is in 2013, like 80% of them joined is because there are young guys not trained and they thought that the idea of the caliphate was very appealing to them, but also because.

00:42:43

Much non discriminating. They wanted everybody.

00:42:48

Male, female is everybody had the road because there were states. So even if you're a female, you had a role in a state jamaatan as far as much more discriminate. They wanted people to be recommended because they thought of themselves as an elite metre organisation. So why would you welcome a woman, for example, you just want to

fight a woman cannot fight no interviews. So they're very discriminating against foreign fighters.

00:43:09

So most of the fighters joined is and most of those died on the battlefield, and those remained are now in prison in the in the east of Australia then.

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Big.

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Part of the French fighters left, especially the Jordanians, when.

00:43:24

When Jabba Nassar renounced al Qaida because they were, they thought they were committed to the organisation. Then many of the commanders closer to Al Qaeda were killed by the US by the US drone strikes, which facilitated or switched transformation because the US was killing internal opponents to Ahmad Shah.

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So whether there is coordination in its or it's a question, but it did.

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Him effectively, but then.

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What happened by 10:20 when it's just clumped down on Al Qaida and dismantled the organisation it started to impose strict conditions on foreign titles, but at least they had to accept Hts's line and because HTS was monopolising governance.

00:44:03

If you are foreign fighters, you don't have a choice. Either you accepted the line of the group or you'd be.

00:44:09

Tortured, you know, mistreatment did happen in prison. So you are really under control of the organisation. So even if you are more radical, you have to accept the line because there was no.

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Relative to to that.

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And to those other frame factors that mostly remain some groups, small groups are more controversial and still hold more radical ideas. So part of the question is what extent can they continue to control them, what HTS did after being becoming the government.

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Then named many of them inside the new Army, which many would say as being a way to reward them as something that's not.

00:44:44

A.

00:44:44

Good sign for the international community because when you have Jordanian Chechen rebel fighters having a place in the army, but part of the argument is actually it's a way to control them. You give them a position of status, but then.

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That control within an army framework. So that's the way the.

00:45:00

The seat. But then it's just also understand they have to be very clear with fine.

00:45:04

A.

00:45:05

Big part of the demands of the international community for their listing is to find a solution to the foreign fighters. They don't want them to become an international threat, so they have to contend.

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But ultimately, many of the French fighters, because they're more committed, they formed the most efficient troops on the grounds, so it's just cannot really.

00:45:26

Repress them or expel them. Still, that's loyal to them. As long as those fighters accept the position. But that links to this idea of Ahmed Mansour, they don't accept any international threat because that will totally disrupt what they are trying to do in terms of legitimacy.

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So anybody like that is going possibly to be arrested and disappeared.

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OK, with us, should we thank our speaker?

00:46:01

Thank you.