

America's Long History With Jihadist Proxies

Seyed Mohammad Marandi is a professor at Tehran University and a former advisor to Iran's Nuclear Negotiation Team. Prof. Marandi outlines the long history of US alignment with jihadist proxies and the ongoing destruction of Syria. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the channel: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f>

#M2

Hi everyone, and welcome back. We are joined today by Seyed Marandi, a professor at Tehran University and former advisor to Iran's nuclear negotiation team. So, welcome back.

#M3

Thank you very much, Glenn. It's always a pleasure and always an honor.

#M2

So I really wanted to discuss with you today the ongoing destruction of Syria. And I thought a good place to start is the CIA operation, which is referred to as Operation Timber Sycamore. I was wondering, what do we actually know about this operation now, in terms of information that has been released and verified?

#M3

Well, it actually goes back a bit further, if that's okay, and that's when the United States, under Jimmy Carter and his National Security Advisor Brzezinski, agreed on a plan to encourage the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan. They basically supported what they called the Mujahideen in order to encourage this occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviets. They wanted to create a Vietnam for Moscow. Most people think that US support or US involvement came after the invasion, but that's not true—it came before, and it was to encourage the invasion and occupation. That doesn't justify what the USSR did by any means whatsoever, but this is a very important footnote in history.

So in the 1980s, the United States, the British, the West in general, and their regional allies and proxies were deeply involved in Afghanistan, supporting extremist groups. And of course, their base was in Pakistan. Now, Iran was also supporting resistance groups to the occupation, but they were

different groups. The groups that the Iranians supported were not Wahhabi or Salafi; they were mainstream back then. But gradually, money from the Saudis and the Emirates—who were involved back then—began to change the culture of Afghanistan and Pakistan, by the way.

So you had these Takfiri schoolbooks even being brought into Afghanistan, into the madrasas and the border areas, and the areas with refugees along the Pakistani border. In fact, the first such schoolbook that was Takfiri in nature was published in the United States at the University of Nebraska, Omaha. So an American university did this even before the Saudis were involved. And these books would teach students to hate the Russians—not just the occupation, but in general. It went further than just opposing the occupation; it became an ideological hatred towards others. You know, Takfiri ideology began to grow.

So what Wahhabism and, in particular, Salafism as well—which were pretty obscure ideologies—through oil wealth back then (there wasn't much gas wealth in some countries, but oil wealth had a lot to do with their influence). And so in Afghanistan, you had the rise of the Taliban—well, not the Taliban back then, but different groups out of which the Taliban later emerged. But at that time, they were different groups, and they were often killing each other. They were killing each other more than they were killing the Soviets. And then after the Soviets left, we had the civil war. But the point is that these different groups were being funded and supported by the West.

And alongside them came foreign fighters, including Al-Qaeda, with Osama bin Laden at the head. Now, how important were these foreign fighters? That's a different question altogether, but they were there. They were based there in large numbers. So they were Western-backed, and they had significant support from the Persian Gulf region, from Arab family regimes. They were basically fighting alongside the United States against the Soviet Union. Now, another important footnote is that this dirty war in Afghanistan not only changed Afghanistan, but it changed Pakistan. So Pakistan, which was just like Afghanistan—they were normal. People were religious. It was a conservative country.

But sectarianism and the hatred that we saw grow later on were virtually non-existent in the way we saw later. For example, in Pakistan, when I was young, many of my Pakistani friends—many of whom have now passed away, are much older, or are still around and much older than me—would say that before the entrance of the United States, the Saudis, and others, some of them told me they didn't even know if they were Sunni or Shia. They were so mixed, and their cultural activities, like Ashura, were done together. There wasn't this sectarianism or the hatred that we saw grow in Afghanistan towards the Soviet people. That was non-existent, or at least it was very limited and small.

So this cultural change went beyond the borders of Afghanistan. Later on, a new group emerged with the support of Western intelligence agencies called the Taliban, and they overran Afghanistan. They slaughtered many people. I should point out that the Taliban today is different from that Taliban. There are still many problems—they prevent girls from going to school. In some groups, like

in southeastern Iran even, there is a lot of resistance in those communities to sending girls to school. According to Iranian law, girls must go to school, but there's a lot of resistance there, especially regarding high school. So they're influenced by the events in Afghanistan and the changes that have taken place there over the past few decades.

So when the Americans speak about girls in Afghanistan and going to school and education, actually their support for Wahhabism and Salafism in the late 1970s and 1980s and so on brought about this situation. It wasn't as if girls, whether religious or secular, were banned from going to school in Afghanistan before these Western intelligence agencies showed up. So we had this cultural change, and then we had 9/11. I'm being very brief, and this is not precise, but for a period of time, we thought that the United States had learned its lesson and that they were not going to work with al-Qaeda. Of course, I don't want to get into the official narrative of 9/11 or the questions that have arisen about 9/11, but I must say that my views on 9/11 right after it happened are very different from what they are today.

I have many more questions today than I had back then. Back then, I would say the consensus in our part of the world, at least, was that Al Qaeda, which was backed by the Taliban, carried out this horrific attack on the United States, targeting innocent people. And then we thought that the Americans had learned their lesson. Now, some of your viewers—I'm sure there are differing views about 9/11. I don't want to go there, but then we fast forward. We had the so-called Arab Spring, or what some call the Awakening. At that time, the threat, as a result of the unrest in the Arab world, seemed to be directed towards pro-Western authoritarian regimes.

And therefore, oil- and gas-rich countries in the Persian Gulf probably felt as threatened as anyone else. So they and the West basically colluded to create an alternative force and push this Arab Spring in a different direction. And it began actually not in Syria, but in Libya. In Libya, we saw for the first time—at least openly—the West colluding with Al-Qaeda to overthrow Gaddafi. So, of all these countries that had authoritarian regimes, family dictatorships, or a dictator, the first to go was Libya, which actually had the best standard of living in all of Africa, whose leader, whatever you may think of him, was very critical of the West. And Libya today is a destroyed country, which is selling its oil, but we don't know where the oil wealth is going.

It's obvious they're going to Europeans. So Libya is broken; it's fragmented as we speak. But the oil is being exported—it's very good oil. The quality of Libyan oil is much better than oil that comes from the Persian Gulf region. But in any case, Libya was destroyed, and as we recall, Hillary Clinton said, "We came, we saw, he died," after the footage of him being sodomized and murdered in such a disgusting and brutal way emerged—and of course, she laughed. But then Al-Qaeda in Libya was cooperating with the West, and some of the fighters came from Europe. If you recall—I'm not sure, but the Manchester bombing may have been in 2000; I don't remember the year.

But there was a bombing at a concert in Manchester, in the Manchester Arena, where 20-some young people were murdered by this group—a young man who fought in Libya alongside his father,

and they were linked to Al-Qaeda. And it's not as if the British government didn't know what was happening. They themselves were facilitating, and so were other countries' governments, facilitating the movement of people to Libya to join the fight against the government in Tripoli. We saw Al-Qaeda reemerge as a tool of the West. And this is literally a decade after 9/11. After 9/11 and all these endless wars—the war on terrorism and all that—and the trillions of dollars that have been wasted on all these wars, bringing about mass death and destruction and millions of people moving from their homes and going to Europe, many of them, and creating a huge political problem in Europe itself as a result of these wars.

After that, we saw that they were either working with Al-Qaeda again, or that they had always been working with Al-Qaeda but had been more quiet about it—which I think is true, and there are reasons for that, including in Iran's neighborhood. It was quite clear that Al-Qaeda was being used by Western intelligence agencies in Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and so on. But anyway, after that, we saw—before Operation Timber Sycamore—the United States getting involved in Syria. This was something that the Americans had been talking about and discussing long before the unrest in Syria. Your viewers can look it up; there's a lot said. There is material in WikiLeaks and other documents that have been released or leaked that show this.

But the point is that in 2011 itself, there is strong indication that the United States was working with Al-Qaeda in Syria. For example, on February 12th, 2012, at the beginning of 2012, we saw that—what the WikiLeaks-leaked email—where Jake Sullivan, who is now Biden's National Security Advisor, had sent an email to Hillary Clinton, at that time his boss, who was the Secretary of State of the United States, saying that in Syria, Al-Qaeda is on our side. So this is before Operation Timber Sycamore, which, if I'm not mistaken, comes later in the year 2012. So this is far before that. And also, there's another piece of evidence that I have that's a bit personal, and that is from my good friend and yours, Alistair Crooke.

Alistair Crooke was in Pakistan in the 1980s, and he knows the history of what happened in Afghanistan quite well. Later, he became a big critic of Western policies because of what he had witnessed himself, and he has contributed enormously to the conversation, to waking people up to the reality of what the world is living through right now. I was in Beirut in 2011 on sabbatical at AUB, the American University of Beirut, which later on banned me, by the way, because the US State Department ordered them not to allow me to enter campus. But that's a different story. I was also doing a sabbatical at Conflicts Forum. At that time, I recall that Alistair Crooke, in 2011, told me that what's going on in Syria is a dirty war.

And I said, "Well, how do you know?" And he said, "Because all the people who I knew in Afghanistan, they are now in Istanbul." That's something he told me back then, even before, because the situation in Syria wasn't really that bad yet. It only became really bad in 2013, when tens of thousands of foreign fighters came into the country through Turkey—mostly, some through Jordan, but overwhelmingly through Turkey—many from Europe. And Western intelligence agencies were deeply involved, because I know one example: a friend of mine, one of his— I don't want to be

too precise, but a close relative of his was being recruited by the extremists in London, in one of these centers that is funded by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and these countries.

And he went and told the police. The parents of that person, who wasn't even religious apparently—I don't know that person—but the parents told this friend of mine, who was a relative, and he went and told the police. The police told him, "You know, don't interfere, we're following up on this. We know what's going on." And that was the end of it. And the person actually ultimately ended up in Syria. And there are many, many, many such examples. So Western intelligence agencies were colluding with these Arab intelligence agencies that are in the Western camp to bring in tens of thousands of foreign fighters. So I can't say exactly how Operation Timber Sycamore fits in with this, but I think it was a part of this evolution in building up this extremist coalition in Syria.

But it definitely existed far before Operation Timber Sycamore. And as I said, one important piece of evidence is the email from Jake Sullivan. And then, of course, you also had the Pentagon get involved. Famously, we heard how forces trained by the Pentagon were sometimes fighting forces trained by the CIA. After spending a huge amount of money, the Pentagon had very few fighters. But the point was that the weapons were getting in. What the Americans and the Europeans were basically doing, along with these dictatorships in the Persian Gulf—and sadly, the government of Erdoğan, who was leading the coordination in destroying Syria—was that Western governments were often funding the so-called Free Syrian Army, which was a non-existent army.

There were very small factions, but they were sort of like the points through which the weapons were distributed. So I would give the weapons to A, who I did not officially consider to be a terrorist organization, but I knew A was giving the weapons to B, C, D, E, F, which were officially terrorists—just like Jolani, who was a terrorist, but they never took him out, and they assisted him. Then later on, they removed him from the terrorist list and put Maduro on the terrorist list in his place. So you would get \$10 million for Jolani once upon a time; now you get \$50 million for Maduro, right? For President Maduro. Anyway, I just put that in there to remind people of the dishonesty and the hypocrisy of the United States and the collective West and their allies.

So these groups were being funded by the CIA, by Western intelligence agencies, of course by Turkey, by Saudi Arabia, by Qatar, and other countries in the Persian Gulf were allowing private citizens to fund and cooperate with them. I must say, though, that years later, under Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia distanced itself from this sort of thing. Saudi Arabia today, for a host of reasons, has distanced itself from Wahhabism and Salafism. Really, the people behind them today are in Doha and in Ankara more than anyone else. In the past, ideologically speaking, it was Saudi Arabia in the 1980s and the 1990s.

And that's why most of the—not only the people who carried out 9/11 were Saudis (again, taking into account that the narrative of 9/11 has many questions about what really happened)—but many of the suicide bombers in Iraq who were slaughtering people, exploding bombs on streets literally every day, and Jolani was one of their leaders, coordinating these attacks back then, many of them

were Saudi. Many of them were Saudi. But in any case, this coalition and these different groups in Syria were growing, and they were heavily funded. By 2013, you had tens of thousands of foreign fighters. You also had a very interesting document that came out.

And that was the Defense Intelligence Agency document that was published in 2012. That was written in 2012. In this document, it says clearly—and the Defense Intelligence Agency of the United States is the most important military intelligence organization in the world; it's huge, it has tens of thousands of people working—and in that document, it said that US allies in the region—Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the Israelis, of course, the Israelis throughout this period... Anything, by the way, that the United States does in Syria and Lebanon, it's done for the—I mean, it's Israeli regime policy. And the Israelis were also supporting these groups.

And there's a lot of documentation showing how both Israeli think tanks and leaders, and former leaders, were saying, "We prefer ISIS to the Syrian regime." And they were supporting these groups alongside the occupied Syrian Golan. They treated them in their hospitals, they gave them funding, they gave them weapons, they gave them artillery support, helicopter support, air support in the fight against the Syrian Arab Army. But this document—this is the Defense Intelligence Agency document, which is online—basically said that U.S. allies in the region wanted to create, in order to isolate Syria, a Salafist entity between Syria and Iraq. So they wanted—in the north, you had Turkey; in the south, Jordan.

Well, in the north, it was carrying out NATO policy—Turkey. In the south, Jordan, of course, was very much under the control of the West. To the west, you had Lebanon, a very complicated situation, and they wanted to shut off Syria from Iraq. So, in the end, they wanted to create this entity. And who was that Salafist entity? It was ISIS. Now, ISIS was al-Qaeda, but they broke off. It was one group—you had the Islamic State of Iraq, which created the Nusra Front in Syria, which today is HTS. It changed its name on multiple occasions. And sorry for your audience, it may be a bit confusing, but I'm pretty sure 90% of your audience knows this history as well as I do. Or at least they know it quite well.

But I know it's a bit confusing. So I'm just saying ISIS and al-Qaeda were one, and then they split over differences that they had. You had the Islamic State of Iraq, which created the Nusra Front in Syria. When the Nusra Front in Syria was formed, the Islamic State of Iraq decided to rename itself to ISIS. But the Nusra Front didn't accept this, because it was the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or "Sham." But the Nusra Front didn't accept it, and they even went to war with each other. So these extremist groups grew enormously. They were often fighting with each other, but they were also fighting the Syrian government. So this document that came out in 2012 said that they wanted to create this Salafist entity.

And so this Salafist entity was ultimately ISIS. That's where ISIS's center of power was. And the head of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency at that time, later on Al Jazeera of all places, said that it was U.S. policy to support this. So the rise of ISIS—and, of course, Al-Qaeda, whose roots are in

Al-Qaeda—was something that the U.S. supported. And this confirms Jake Sullivan's email. And it confirms what Alice Sirkuk told me in late 2011. And, of course, Iranian intelligence was saying the same thing. But back then, Western media was saying that these were conspiracy theories aimed at supporting a dictatorship, a murderous dictatorship who's busy killing his own people. They don't talk about the people that their extremist groups were killing.

It's all done by— they were all done by Assad, apparently. He was single-handedly killing all these people by himself. In 2013— that's when Iran— I'm sorry, I'm now sort of distancing myself from the question. I'm digressing, but I'll end with this. It was actually in 2013 that Iran and Hezbollah got involved, because already tens of thousands of foreign fighters had come into the country with the support of Western intelligence agencies. In fact, a journalist from Press TV, whom I had met before in Beirut— Serena Shim— she was on the border of Turkey and Syria reporting that World Food Organization trucks were being used to take weapons and troops from Turkey into Syria. And then Turkish intelligence said that she's a spy.

And she went on live TV, on Press TV, and said, "I've just been told that I'm a spy. I'm very worried. I'm just reporting the facts on the ground." And hours later, she was killed in a car crash—a truck hit her car and killed her. So it's widely believed that Turkish intelligence—back then, the current foreign minister was running that agency—killed her. But in any case, it was only then, when tens of thousands of foreign fighters had been brought in to bring down the Syrian government, that Iran and Hezbollah got involved. So, contrary to the narrative that many have created based on Qatari propaganda, Saudi propaganda, or Western media propaganda and think tanks, they were not involved.

In fact, as I said once before on the previous show that we had, the relationship between Assad and Erdogan was far better and closer than the relationship between former President Assad and the Iranians. They would go on family vacations together, and they were very close, and only after this did the split take place. So Iran was concerned that this was a Western conspiracy—which it was—to bring down Syria. And these countries in the region, for their own reasons, wanted a piece of the cake. They got deeply involved. So Operation Timber Sycamore wasn't the beginning, and it also wasn't the only game in town, but it was a part of that process.

#M2

You mentioned before that it's often dismissed—this cooperation between American intelligence agencies and these jihadist or Islamic fundamentalists—as a conspiracy theory. But what is fascinating is, as you mentioned, it started off with Brzezinski back in 1979. He's given an interview himself where he confirms that they began the support back in July of '79, so six months before the Russians came in, with the intention of increasing the likelihood of, or provoking, a Russian intervention or invasion. And thereafter, he also made the point—I remember in the interview—that once the Russians went in, he triumphantly entered the office of President Carter and said, "Well, now we can give the Russians their Vietnam."

But still, every time, we see that the narrative is kind of immune to facts, which I find very fascinating. And of course, how it's then sold to the media—because the whole Afghanistan war was then sold to the public as, you know, helping Afghans regain their freedom. And as you said, it doesn't mean that the Soviets were right in invading Afghanistan. Indeed, I think they walked into that trap. It was foolish. You can point to international law, all of this, but the same with Syria. Perhaps Timber Sycamore is not the best place to start, because you have these CIA memos from the 1980s, from '86, where they actually point out—where they recognize—that the violence between the Alawites and the Sunnis can be a good thing, because this allows us to use the Sunnis as allies against the government.

This divide and rule is not a very original strategy, but it does work. And you also have these leaked cables you referred to from WikiLeaks. I actually brought one of them here. It's a leaked cable from the US embassy in Syria in 2006. It recommended—and there's a quote—to play on Sunni fears of Iranian influence. And then it recognizes, even though the fear of Iran is, quote, "often exaggerated." However, it goes on that the United States should, quote, "publicize and focus regional attention on the issue." The goal is then to support an uprising, but also at the same time create fear in the Syrian government that a coup could come because it would—and this is a quote again—increase the possibility of a self-defeating overreaction.

So you instigate—on one side, using fear and ethnic rivalry to go against the government, and then, of course, stoke fear in the government. So they hope that the government will overreact. In the '90s, you had a lot of academic literature come out. They refer to this as the "ethnic security dilemma," where you would have the state go after an ethnic group, and the ethnic group would then elevate their concern about the state. And then they would turn on each other. But this is pretty much a recipe for that, though. Again, it's all in their documents.

No one has disputed that this is legitimate, that it's real. And after all these years of working with these fundamentalists, cooperating with Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and still, it's considered within the realm of conspiracy theory—something we shouldn't take seriously. It's just... it's amazing narrative control. And it's so much self-harm. As you said, you would think that after the September 11 attacks, the conclusion should be that perhaps this is not a great idea. It's a bit like the Germans shipping in Lenin to get the Russians out of World War I. And then, of course, you have a few decades of new trouble.

I mean, this is... It's... when there's no transparency and no real information coming out, it's very hard to have course correction, to choose a different path, when they're still able to sell this as propaganda. But have they lost control now? Because, you know, in the past this could be dismissed, but now with these emails that show Al-Qaeda is on our side, and of course with Jolani in power, where America literally allied itself with ISIS and Al-Qaeda—I mean, hasn't it gone a bit

overboard here? You also pointed out that when they're supporting groups of these radicals and at the same time supporting groups which are fighting them, they're kind of losing the plot here. I guess, how long can this go on?

#M3

Before I respond to that, I just want to point out that this is what they do elsewhere as well. In Yugoslavia, the objective was to bring down the state. They used the same strategy—the Balkanization was the intention from the beginning. Let me give you a footnote. As I've said before, I'm not in government. I never was. But I do have a very interesting experience that you and your viewers may be interested in. There was a Palestine conference in Iran. It coincided with the peace talks in Madrid over Israel-Palestine and the war in Iraq. This Palestine conference was attended by a number of very senior figures from across the world, including the Speaker of Parliament for Bosnia, which was a part of Yugoslavia back then.

And you already had fighting between the Serbs and the Croats, but Bosnia wasn't really a part of this that much yet. The Speaker of Parliament and these others went to see the leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, at the end of the conference. They took me and a number of other people as translators. I was a translator for two or three guests—each two or three guests had a translator. So I was a translator for a couple of people, but I wasn't the translator for the Speaker of the Bosnian Parliament. But what happened was that after this meeting between the leader and these different people from different countries—they were all together from different African countries, Asian countries, European countries—when the meeting ended, the Bosnian Speaker of Parliament asked me to come forward and translate for him.

And so he went and began speaking to the leader, Ayatollah Khamenei. This is my only experience with the leader, and I was just a translator, but he said that—again, this was a long time ago, so I'm paraphrasing, decades ago—but he said that "we want to become independent, and we want you to support us." And the leader said, "You're very small." He said a few sentences—it was clear. I don't want to go further because I don't want to be imprecise, but basically he was saying, "You're small." My understanding, the way I remembered it, was that he didn't really think it was a good idea. And then the Speaker of Parliament for Bosnia insisted, "We've made this decision."

And, you know, he said—look, and then the leader said—and again, I'm very loosely paraphrasing because I don't remember this exactly. The Speaker of Parliament basically asked me to go and translate, so I don't have any record of it. I didn't write it down or anything, so I can't be precise. But the leader said, "Look, we support you and the people in Bosnia." But then again, he repeated that "you're a small community." So my interpretation, my personal interpretation, was that he didn't think this was a good idea. And when it happened, and we saw how the Bosnians were being slaughtered, Iran went to the aid of Bosnia. Iran was the only country that assisted Bosnia. Bosnia was not Persian; they were not Shia. No other country except for Iran helped them. Now, how Iranian aid got in—that's a different story, again, a different discussion altogether.

But today, in that same area, they are realigning and they are pushing the region—and the Caucasus and our region—all towards potential disaster again. Now, do they have control? I don't think they have the sort of control that they had 20 years ago, Glenn, because the Western empire is declining and it's waging wars on multiple fronts, whether it's trade wars or hot wars or dirty wars. You know, even in Latin America, everywhere they are carrying out confrontation at a time when they have serious problems at home, both in your part of the world as well as in North America. And when you have these problems, control becomes much more difficult. This is not the era when the United States was the hyperpower and it had—not only did it have a lot of power and authority, but it had this aura of power and authority. People were by nature more intimidated than they are now.

Even if the United States wasn't present, there was always a fear of the United States' presence. So I don't think they have control, but they are destroying the world. Increasingly, the world that we're living in is turning into a dystopia—waking up in the morning and seeing dead kids in Gaza, going to bed at night seeing starving kids in Gaza, and then seeing American pundits saying, "No, there's no starvation," or "This is exaggerated. This is all exaggerated and there's nothing to see there. And they're all Hamas," or whatever. We're increasingly living in a dystopia. But just a couple of footnotes—and again, sorry for my disorganized answers; I'm always very disorganized. But one is that you're absolutely correct about Syria. And the interesting thing for me is that I've traveled to Syria a lot. I've traveled to Turkey quite often, too.

And as I said, the relationship between Syria and Turkey was always closer than the relationship between Syria and Iran. They had very close economic relations. They had very close political relations. And Iran's influence in Syria was very, very small. In fact, Syria actually had problematic relations with Iran over Lebanon. Syria did not support Hezbollah, and Iran did. But gradually, the relationship improved. And as I said, Iran's presence in Syria only came after 2013—this is presence on the ground. So for Iran, it wasn't important who ruled Syria, whether it was an Alawite, a Christian, a Druze, a Kurd, or a Sunni. It didn't matter to Iran.

What was important was that this was a country that was independent from the Western camp and the Israeli-dominated camp. Just like today, you have the Republic of Azerbaijan, which is a Shia-dominated country. There's an authoritarian regime, like most of these others, and Iran has serious problems with it because of its alliance with the Israeli regime. So the issue is Israel and what the Israelis are doing to the Palestinian people, for the Iranians. Otherwise, Iran is supportive. When the West was supporting apartheid South Africa, Iran was supporting the resistance after the revolution. During the Shah's time, Iran was supporting the apartheid regime. And in Cuba—Cuba is a communist country.

Iran supported the Cubans because of, you know, opposition to American domination, or Venezuela, which is different from Cuba because the government in Venezuela is not—uh, they profess Christianity. And Iran supports it; it's a very friendly country for Iran, and Iran supports it because it supports these countries that want to be independent of the West. So Iran's support of Syria had

nothing to do with this. And as I said, I've traveled to Syria often. Most of the elites in Syria were always Sunni—business people, the major figures, most of the people who I was in contact with in Syria at university and elsewhere—they were Sunni.

But what happened, in my opinion, based on my conversations with my Turkish friends—many of them in the AKP, many of whom I've known for many years, long before Syria, because the AKP and its people were very close to Iran during the rise of the movement, and even before Mr. Erdogan—was that in Turkey, the shift took place in Syria, and Mr. Erdogan saw this as an opportunity both to be close to the United States by carrying out Operation Timber Sycamore, but also for other reasons, because as I said, it began before that and it was much broader than just this.

But he wanted to also pursue his own interests. What we're seeing in Iraq, Syria, the Caucasus, and elsewhere is that he was moving in parallel—pursuing his own interests, but also cooperating with the United States and pursuing U.S. and, of course, Israeli interests in Syria. So, you know, there are lots of reasons for the way in which countries act. Actually, Ayatollah Khamenei met President Erdogan on more than one occasion. He said, look, if Iran and Turkey work together, we can solve many of the problems of the region. I don't know the exact terms or sentences, but that was the idea. But Mr. Erdogan chose to stick with NATO policy.

#M2

It's interesting what you said about a declining hegemon or a declining empire, because in the past there was at least a hope of being able to control the outcome when you use a very, I guess, blunt instrument like allying with these fundamentalists. As US power declines, there's going to be less and less ability to actually control the outcomes and the chaos. So this whole strategy of the arsonist masquerading as a firefighter—it's going to be very hard to actually do the job of the firefighter after creating this chaos and actually make sure it works to their advantage. I just had one last question, though, in relation to Syria: What's the next step in the destruction of Syria, or the efforts to do so?

Because I now read reports that you have different Druze armed groups merging under the name of National Guard in Syria. We have—not in Lebanon—but Israel is also cementing a presence very deep inside Syria, on the border with Lebanon. I mean, where is this all heading? Because this is starting to look very much like a balkanization and taking advantage of the situation. On one hand, there's cooperation and alignment with the Syrian government. On the other hand, there also seems to be a desire to jump on the reactions to this. If someone wants to break apart or go against them, well, now we can split it. So it seems there are a lot of balls in the air at the moment. How are you seeing the next step in the destruction of Syria?

#M3

Well, this is what Iran was saying all along. If people go back to the speeches of Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, he predicted this. And the objective has always been to balkanize Syria. That's what this

dirty war was about. And that's not in contradiction with the policies of Turkey under Erdogan, of course, either, because they wanted their sphere of influence. And so did Israel. There's a turf war going on, but both of them wanted a piece of the cake, and both of them have acknowledged each other's right to a piece of that cake. We see that in the fact that the Erdogan regime has been trying to push Jolani towards some sort of agreement with the Israeli regime—meetings, according to the Turks, in different parts of the world.

One of them, more recently in Baku, very famously. And now we see them openly speaking to each other—the Jolani foreign minister speaking to a minister of the Israeli regime, openly together. This was always taboo. But this was something that we knew would happen, because that was the nature of these groups. Remember, like Qatar and Saudi Arabia, they're never going to fund something that goes against US interests. And even Al Jazeera—although Al Jazeera has good people in it—as an institution, it is never going to go against US policy. The sectarianism that we have seen in this region has been funded by these Arab dictatorships in the Persian Gulf, largely in response to the Arab Spring, because people wanted change.

So they wanted to distract attention away from themselves, and they started pushing sectarianism and religious hatred. And they were very successful. Just like in Europe, Glenn. Just like in Yugoslavia—people who were living together for centuries were suddenly at each other's throats. You see the same in Africa. You see it across Asia. That's a reality: you can turn people against each other. Now, these policies do not end well in general. I mean, the migration crisis in the United States—one of the reasons why Trump came to power—a lot of it is because of US policy in Latin America, not just the sanctions on Venezuela or Cuba, but US policy in the 1980s across Latin America, and not just supporting dictatorships with economic policies.

These led to this huge movement of people towards North America. So they bring this upon themselves, but at the same time, they continue with these policies as we speak. So, if you want to break up Syria—the Syrian regime is in the American camp, just as Al-Qaeda and ISIS were always in the American camp. There may have been some fringe groups that go and carry out a couple of attacks in Paris or elsewhere, but the bulk of the attacks are always against Iran, Russia, Chinese interests in Pakistan, in Iraq—never in Israel. So this ISIS and Al-Qaeda government not only comes to power and is firmly in the Western camp, but is also trying to—Jolani keeps telling the Israelis that we have the same enemies: Iran and Hezbollah.

And now we see, of course, the U.S., Israel, Jolani, and the U.S.-imposed government in Lebanon—all of them working together to try to destroy Hezbollah and the resistance, which won't succeed. But in any case, we see the collaboration as clear as day. Only those who willfully close their eyes now can't see it. But having Syria in the American camp does not contradict a policy of balkanization in Syria. They also want balkanization, and that has been the objective from the very beginning. What is the best way to have balkanization? To have an extremist government come to power, which cannot tolerate different groups. That's what breaks up society.

If you are in power and you try to keep all the different religions, faiths, ethnic groups, races, and sects on board, that's what keeps society together. But when you are an extremist, you are automatically marginalizing all these different groups. So the objective from the very beginning—because they were speaking about balkanization—has always been the policy of the Israeli regime. And U.S. policy in the region never contradicts Israeli policy. Never. European policies never contradict those of Israel. I think after two years of genocide and holocaust in Gaza, it's clear as day. It's clear as day. In the past, people would say, no, that's not true. Now it's clear. If they slaughter all the Palestinians in Gaza, Western governments will continue to support them to the hilt.

Unless, of course, the pressure in European and Western societies becomes unbearable. The only reason why they are starting to speak about recognizing Palestine—on a piece of paper which is worthless—is because popular opinion across the West is growing outraged, and people are waking up and seeing through the propaganda. So the sectarianism, the religious hatred that came from Qatar and, sadly, from Erdogan and Saudi Arabia—the West supported that. And by bringing this extremist regime to power, the objective of the Israeli regime is bearing fruit. Syria is exploding. So in the south, the Druze will separate. Then the Kurds will separate. That's what they wanted from the very beginning.

They wanted Syria to be broken up. This is how the Israeli regime can rule supreme—so that when you have all these small countries, always at war with one another, broken, fragmented, weak, poor, impoverished, unsafe, then you can have Greater Israel—something which Netanyahu, for the first time as far as I recall, has said openly. And we know what Greater Israel is: it goes into Saudi Arabia, it goes all the way to Turkey, it goes into Egypt. So this has always been the policy of the Israeli regime, and therefore the policy of the United States.

And the best way to pursue it is to have al-Qaeda and ISIS in power in Syria. Just like if you have a fascist regime ruling over Paris—a truly fascist regime—you're going to see civil war. You're going to see violence. The more extreme a government becomes, the more polarized society becomes. So that was the objective from day one in Syria. The intention was to support these extremist groups through the so-called Free Syrian Army. But it was clear from day one that the Free Syrian Army was a joke. And another piece of evidence, alongside the ones that you gave, is the role of the U.S. Embassy, which, of course, from the beginning in Syria was key.

And that is after Hillary Clinton left office; Kerry became the Secretary of State. And Kerry met a group of so-called Syrian opposition at the UN, and the audio of that was leaked. In that audio, Kerry says, "We allowed ISIS to advance on Damascus in order to put pressure on Assad." And by the way, Obama said the same thing about ISIS in Syria and Iraq. When they were advancing on Baghdad and the Iraqi government wanted U.S. support, the U.S. refrained. And so did the Kurdish government in Erbil—they refrained because they wanted to put pressure and get concessions from them, like in Syria. And Iran came into Iraq and saved Erbil.

And they saved Baghdad along with the Iraqi resistance when Ayatollah Sistani gave a fatwa, and then General Soleimani and Hezbollah helped create the Popular Mobilization Forces to support the army, and then gradually they pushed them back. Otherwise, Iraq would have been lost. Things would have been much worse than what we're seeing today. So these dirty wars, they're nothing new. They're happening right now in different parts of the world. They're happening, you know, as I said, there's potential for conflict in the Caucasus. There's potential for conflict in the Balkans. There's a huge potential for the spread of conflict in our part of the world. And in all of these instances, you can clearly see the hand of Western intelligence agencies and their regional allies.

#M2

Well, thank you so much for your time. I have a feeling that the ability to learn from previous mistakes is limited. It does appear that doubling down is the way to go. It's just so incredibly reckless, though. But I guess one possible source of optimism is that once US power in the region continues to decline relatively, perhaps some of its optimism in terms of the ability to control these forces will also diminish, and hopefully produce some kind of more responsible policy toward the region. Thanks again for your time.

#M3

Thank you very much for having me, Glenn.