



The White House Welcomes a "Former" TERRORIST?

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

Glenn Greenwald (GG): I opened up the show talking about the visit to the White House today by what is now being called the President of Syria, who in fact spent his entire adult life as an operative and then a leader for al-Qaeda – one hated so much by the United States government that as recently as 11 months ago, they had a \$10 million bounty on his head, accusing him not just of being a leader of al-Qaeda and killing Americans, but also working alongside ISIS, but he's now a beloved leader. They put a suit on him, changed his name and he seems to have undergone a complete transformation, at least in terms of how he's treated – somebody who for years was considered one of the worst terrorists on the planet. I think it says so much about the War on Terror, about the emptiness and manipulative propagandist nature of the term "terrorism". I talked about it at the start of the show, just giving the context for the War on Terror, the 25 years of the radical changes it ushered in, to point out how, in so many ways, bizarre this is, how history is so easily rewritten at the spur of the moment.

So here's the New York Times today: *Syria's President Meets Donald Trump at White House First Time*. Quote: "President Trump waived sanctions on Syria on Monday after meeting with President Ahmed al-Shara at the White House, the latest effort to throw his support behind the former rebel leader who had once been designated a terrorist by the United States with a \$10 million bounty on his head". And again, that wasn't 20 years ago, that was less than a year ago that the United States called him a terrorist, so evil and so wanted that they had a \$10 million bounty on his head. "Mr. Trump has granted Syria-wide exemptions on sanctions and pushed for Congress to repeal a 2019 law, the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, which imposed the toughest sanctions on Syria. On Monday, he issued a 180-day extension on a waiver that he had first granted in May. It was Mr. al-Shara's first visit to the US capital since coming to power and the first by any Syrian head of state to the White House. Quote, 'We want to see Syria become a country that's very successful. And I think this leader can do it', Mr. Trump said. 'People say he's had a rough past. We've all had rough pasts.'" Who hasn't been an al-Qaeda leader before? "'We've had rough pasts, but he has had a rough past. And I frankly, if he didn't have a rough past, you wouldn't have a chance'."

I mean, that is Trump's view of the world. It's not entirely baseless that in order to become an effective leader, especially of a complex country, you have to have shown some grit. But we fought a 25-year war based on the view that we've never faced anything as evil or as dangerous as al-Qaeda. And so to call being a leader of al-Qaeda "having your rough past", sort of minimizes the entire premise of the War on Terror, which by the way is ongoing and which radically changed our country and our standing in the world in so many permanent ways. Here was Trump offering a similar analysis when he was asked about the terrorist who used to be called al-Julani and now its President al-Shara. Here he was in the Oval Office on November 10th.

Reporter: Did you come to any agreements today?

Donald Trump: Well, I had an agreement with him. He's a very strong leader. He comes from a very tough place, and he's a tough guy. I like him. I get along with him, the president, the new president of Syria. And we'll do everything we can to make Syria successful because that's part of the Middle East. We have peace now in the Middle East, first time that anyone can remember that ever happening.

GG: Now I'm not suggesting that the United States should go to war with Syria or try to kill the new Syrian leader because of his longstanding ties to al-Qaeda, but I'm not somebody who believed in the War on Terror and the premises of it from the start. So of course I wouldn't believe that. But it was the bipartisan political class in Washington that believed in that and continues to believe in that. That wherever we find al-Qaeda leaders, we have to bomb them, not hug them and embrace them and praise them as a good guy and welcome them to the White House. It really, for me, just gives, the important part of this story is not that Trump per se is doing anything wrong, but that it just gives the lie to the entire War on Terror, the whole narrative that we were fed. Again, not just to justify all sorts of foreign wars that killed huge numbers of people and cost two trillion dollars and enriched the arms dealers, but radically transformed the nature of American politics and the powers of the American government inside the United States with respect to our own citizens. The Patriot Act and all of the carousel of evils that we're living with today was all based on this idea that everything had to be done for the paramount goal of extinguishing al-Qaeda.

One of the people who did believe that was Donald Trump. And let's remember that in the Obama administration, Hillary Clinton was a very vocal advocate of removing Bashar al-Assad from power, of empowering the CIA, to wage war in Syria to take out Assad, in part because it was part of her obsession with Russia. Assad was an ally of Syria [Russia], but also she was a loyalist to Israel, and Israel wanted Assad gone. He was a link between Iran and Hezbollah, part of this axis of resistance that opposed Israel. And Donald Trump's view when he ran for president in 2016 but also before he even announced his presidency was that the Obama covert war in Syria – where Obama didn't give Hillary everything she wanted, he unleashed a billion-dollar-a-year CIA covert war to remove Assad. We were looking to remove Assad, knowing that who would replace Assad would be people who are al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda adjacent. Meaning we were still waging the War on Terror based on the argument

that al-Qaeda, there was no enemy like it, nothing threatened us more. We had to extinguish them no matter where we found them.

And then in Syria, the Obama administration was essentially engaged in an operation to remove Assad for some reason, someone the United States had worked with, had sent people we detained and picked off the streets of Europe during the War on Terror and sent them to Assad to be tortured. Suddenly removing Assad was some huge priority of the United States, even though the people fighting against Assad – at the beginning, they were ordinary Syrians, but by the time the war really broke out, as it often happens, it was the experienced fighters of ISIS and al-Qaeda fighting against Syria, and we knew that removing Assad would result in al-Qaeda becoming empowered.

And it was Trump himself who said it here, September 4th, 2013: "Many Syrian, quote, 'rebels' are really radical jihadis. Not our friends. And supporting them doesn't serve our national interest. Stay out of Syria!" Which is not exactly a crazy idea if your entire country is reorganized around the idea that you have to destroy al-Qaeda and you suddenly find yourself engaged in a covert war and increasingly an overt war that has either the goal or the likely effect of empowering al-Qaeda in that country, it does seem extremely contradictory, to put it mildly. It kind of makes the whole War on Terror and all of the radical erosion of rights and death and everything else measured in, a gigantic fraud. It's kind of hard to maintain the central premise that al-Qaeda is the world's greatest threat when we're actually looking to empower al-Qaeda in Syria, something that we've now successfully done.

And we seem thrilled about it, as does Israel, which boasted that it played a major role in accomplishing that. Here is an email that was inside the Hillary Clinton State Department in 2012, while the United States was fighting this covert CIA war to remove Assad. It was an email that was released ultimately as a result of the hack of the Hillary Clinton emails, and it was published by WikiLeaks. And it is an email from Jake Sullivan, who, of course, became Joe Biden's national security advisor. A lot of people think he ran foreign policy as Biden's brain was melting. I certainly think that. He also had a very high up position in the Obama State Department under Hillary Clinton. And he wrote an email that is now a notorious email to Hillary Clinton about the situation in Syria. This is basically a decade after September 11th, the War on Terror is in full force. Obama's embracing and extending many of the Bush-Cheney policies that he vowed in his campaign to uproot, saying "no, al-Qaeda is still an existential threat. We have to keep these powers in the hands of the US government", including the United States that was NSA spying without warrants and everything else. And it was all based on the idea that al-Qaeda was the gravest enemy we've ever seen.

And yet, as this then secret email inside the Clinton State Department acknowledged on Syria, Jake Sullivan wrote to Hillary Clinton: "See the last item – al-Qaeda is on our side in Syria". I mean, it's really one of the most remarkable things. "Al-Qaeda is on our side in Syria". We're fighting this major covert war at the height, the peak of the War on Terror. And we weren't there to fight al-Qaeda. We were there to fight with al-Qaeda, knowing that if we succeeded in our goal, which is removing Assad, it wasn't going to be some nice Syrian

liberal who was going to take over that country, that very geostrategically crucial country in the middle of the region, it was going to be al-Qaeda. We were fighting a war to empower al-Qaeda in Syria. It took a decade and we finally succeeded in it. We seemed utterly giddy about it. We couldn't be happier with the al-Qaeda leader who less than a year ago wanted to kill and find and pay ten million dollars to do so based on the fact that he was the evilest of terrorists. He just put on a suit, changed his name, promised to love Israel and join an alliance with Israel, and now poof, all the al-Qaeda evil is gone.

In case any of you have any doubts about whether any of this was ever authentic or sincere, or whether the word "terrorist" actually means anything, the fact that it can just be diffused in an instant. Here from the BBC, this was December 20th, 2024, again, less than a year ago. This was when, essentially, al-Qaeda forces swept into Damascus. *US scraps a \$10 million bounty for the arrest of Syria's new leader Shara*. I remember when he, at the time, was known as al-Julani still, before he got his Western makeup. I remember he led forces into Damascus, and he was appearing giving press conferences. And right on the DOJ site it still had this \$10 million bounty on his head. And I wrote an email to the Justice Department saying, "hey, you have a \$10 billion bounty on the head of al-Julani for information leading to his whereabouts. I know where he is. He's in the Presidential Palace in Damascus".

Here you have the Justice Department. This is up at least as late as November 2024. There you see a picture of him. That's al-Julani, President al-Shara, as he's now known. "Stop this terrorist". And you see he exchanged his classic terrorist headgear and camouflage clothing for Armani suits. Still the same person. "Stop this terrorist, Muhammad al-Julani. Reward for justice. Up to \$10 million reward". And then at the bottom in small print it says, "Muhammad al-Julani, also known as Abu Muhammad al-Gulani, also known as", and then various other names, "is the senior leader of the terrorist organization the Al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria. Under al-Julani's leadership, ANF has carried out multiple terrorist attacks throughout Syria, often targeting civilians. The US Government is offering a reward of up to \$10 million for information about al-Julani. Absolute confidentiality is assured".

So this wasn't just some guy who joined al-Qaeda because he had nothing else to do. He wasn't some low level courier. According to the Justice Department, he was the leader of al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria who was responsible for deliberately slaughtering civilians across the country. He spent time in an American prison in Iraq as well. And then less than a year later, no longer a terrorist. He's an honored leader of a sovereign country, a friend of the United States, someone Donald Trump admires despite his "rough past".

Here from ABC News in February of 2012, this was about the organization which al-Julani founded: *Twin Suicide Attacks Rattle Syrian City of Aleppo*. He was accused of having carried out suicide attacks against civilians in Aleppo, which we were always told was the hallmark of radical Islamic terrorism. So this wasn't a guy who was kind of a member in good standing. The way you can join a union and not really participate. He was the leader who carried out, according to the United States, suicide attacks.

Here from Al Arabiya English, June of 2015: *Al-Qaeda's Syria affiliate kills 20 Druze*. "The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the deaths come Wednesday in the village of Qalb-Lawzah in the Idlib Province". Here is some of the reaction to al-Shara's presence, al-Julani's presence in the United States when he came first in November of 2025.

GG: Really, I want you to just imagine going back 20 years ago, but even 10 years ago, even five years ago and tell people, look, I know you're in the middle of the War on Terror. You believe the most evil groups are the Taliban and al-Qaeda. We have to even dismantle our own civil liberties, destroy them, and fight endless wars to do so. But I'm just telling you, in 2025, the Taliban are going to be governing Afghanistan with absolutely no opposition, as if nothing ever happened. We're going to fight a 20-year war in Afghanistan, and once we leave, the Taliban is going to be like, "all right, we're here, time to go back into power" and govern Afghanistan, as though a 20 year war that might as well never had happened, not one thing changed other than a bunch of deaths and money. And on top of that, a senior leader of al-Qaeda is going to come to the United States and be welcomed by throngs of cheering people and then embraced by the president of the United States as a great friend of the United States. Not someone who was in al-Qaeda in 2005 and renounced it and defected to the West, but somebody who less than a year before was called one of the worst terrorist al-Qaeda leaders by the Justice Department.

I mean, it's a farce. It is a farce. And this farce demonstrates that this word, "terrorism", which is at the center of our legal framework and dominates our political discourse – you call someone a terrorist and it's supposed to be the end of the debate. Oh, look what we're doing to this person. Oh, he's a terrorist. Oh, is he a terrorist? Oh, in that case, who cares? Torture him, drown him, poke his eyes out, send him to Sudan in a prison. Whatever you have to do. He's a terrorist. Oh, we're blowing up boats? That sounds odd. What about the evidence that they're doing something wrong, like carrying drugs? No, no, these are narco-terrorists. Oh, okay, terrorists. I'm sorry, I didn't know. Yeah, of course, kill them. No evidence needed. Why would you protect terrorists?

That's how powerful this word is. This word means nothing. It means nothing! It's just assigned arbitrarily to whoever we want to demonize to justify whatever we wanna do to them. Routinely, people who attack soldiers in an active military are called terrorists, people who target civilians are not. People who are terrorists one day become freedom fighters and the next and vice versa. This has been going on for decades. This is a word that is bereft of meaning. It's a pure propaganda term. Maybe in academia, you can find fixed meanings of it. In politics, it has no consistent application. It's an empty word and for that reason, so useful and so dangerous.

END

Thank you for reading this transcript. Please don't forget to donate to support our independent and non-profit journalism:

BANKKONTO:

Kontoinhaber: acTVism München e.V.
Bank: GLS Bank
IBAN: DE89430609678224073600
BIC: GENODEM1GLS

PAYPAL:

E-Mail: PayPal@acTVism.org

PATREON:

<https://www.patreon.com/acTVism>

BETTERPLACE:

Link: [Click here](#)