

Rojava & Revolution with Josh Walker (YPG)

Josh Walker & Mexie

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Abstract

This week Mexie interviews Josh Walker, a comrade who fought with the YPG in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria. Josh lays out the history and political ideology of the revolution, the extent to which feminist ideals are incorporated into their revolutionary praxis, and he addresses some of the common criticisms of the movement including their strategic military alliances or agreements with the U.S. and the Assad regime. He also talks about his time with the YPG and the importance of internationalist collaboration, and honours his comrade Anna Campbell of the YPJ who was killed in Afrin.

Full Transcript

MEXIE: Hey everyone, welcome to the Vegan Vanguard, a show that confronts a wide range of topics from a leftist, anticapitalist feminist.

Anti all the isanti.

All the isms.

Pro animal liberation.

Pro human liberation.

Radical vegan perspective.

Damn girl, I'm mexi and.

Usually I co-host this podcast with.

The love of my life marine from a privileged vegan.

However, she is in Spain at the moment attending a conference.

So this week and actually also in two weeks you will have interviews from me.

We thought we would take this opportunity for me to do some interviews 'cause Marine's already done a couple, and the timing of everything right now is just a bit.

Strange. As I said, right now Marine's in Spain and then at the end of this week I am actually traveling to Europe.

For several weeks I'm going to be attending a conference of my own and then the last week of this month I am actually going to be visiting rain in France.

Well, we're going to meet.

For the first time in our lives, Can you believe that we have not actually met in real life?

That's kind of unbelievable to me.

But anyway, we're really excited we are going to record 2 podcasts together.

Probably we're.

Going to make.

A whole ton of content.

We're going to recruit some videos.

Together so.

Yeah, it's really exciting.

And so yeah, that's why we're going to have interviews for the next couple of episodes, but you don't stay tuned.

So today I'm going to be talking with Josh Walker, who went over to fight with the YPG in Rojava, and who is just a wealth of knowledge of all things relating to the Kurdish revolution.

And in two weeks.

I have a really exciting episode coming up with Becky Ellis, who is a bppe.

Expert and we're going to be talking about insect get in and the bee decline and the implications of that and capitalism and productive ways forward that could lead us to a multi species Commons which I found really, really cool.

So stay tuned for that and then.

I am also going to be interviewing Rania kolek about Syria.

Some of you may be aware of her work.

She was recently on Rev Left Radio as well, so you can.

Check her out there.

So yeah, we're going.

To space it out a little.

Bit so that we don't just have a month and a.

Half straight on Syria.

But it is a really big topic.

It is a really divisive topic, which we saw with the last interview with Jan.

Which we saw coming, frankly, when I first heard the interview, I told Marine, you know, I think there's a lot here that can challenge us on the left and and make us pause and reflect on our own positions, however.

People are going to be real emotional about this and they did, they really did and and we were not surprised.

We were not surprised at all.

But I think it was still quite interesting and I was really interested to hear the perspective or the criticisms of the anti imperialist left.

And of course, when I was listening to it, I did not agree with everything that was being said and I certainly felt uncomfortable.

For a lot of the time because I do identify as part of the anti imperialist left and I have been very vocal about that with respect to Syria, but.

I also have some really great, brilliant, you know, radical leftist comrades in Toronto that I really respect and I had seen them sharing kind of similar things prior to when Marine had done this interview and they kind of shipped me a little bit because, you know, I here I am being super vocal about.

And yeah, it really did actually give me a bit of pause.

So, you know, one of my friends shared.

I think it was an article that was called.

Anti imperialism for idiots or something like that.

Excuse the ableism with that term, but it was along that line, so it was from a Syrian perspective.

And of course there are innumerable Syrian perspectives, and we cannot essential eyes or presume that we know what what any Syrian maybe thinking.

This person was saying, you know, I am against Western imperialism, but I'm also, you know, I'm not going to spend all this energy being mad that a bomb drop.

On an empty military base of a ruler who is torturing my family, right?

You know, so those are just not my priorities.

And yeah, I mean, it gave me a bit of pause, and I I thought that.

I thought that what Yang was saying about the general discourse on the left.

A lot of people.

Acting or conducting themselves as if they do own.

Syria I I thought that that was.

Kind of true.

And I kind of felt that, you know, we do spend a lot of time focusing on the bombs, which I I mean, I don't think that we should not focus on them, but I also don't see that same kind of fervent energy for people, you know, trying to force their governments.

To open the borders, I just don't frankly see that.

I mean, we know that only 11 Syrian refugees have been LED into the United States and certainly people are working on that.

But I feel like in leftist circles we we kind of do spend a lot of energy sharing.

Things online about how bad imperialism is, but I I guess I I don't see that much energy being devoted to to really helping the Syrian refugees.

So anyway, no matter.

What you agreed or disagreed with, hopefully there is.

Still something that you could take.

Away from it, or even just to use what was being said to reflect on your own positions and assumptions and think about how perhaps you are conducting yourself and the discourse that you're putting out.

And are you ignoring different perspectives that?

That's that should be heard.

And so anyway, that's all I'll say about that.

But I did want to say that, you know, we completely welcome criticism and if we have a guest on that you don't agree with, we definitely welcome comments.

We welcome people talking about what they thought.

Was missing what they thought was perhaps contradictory or or whatever with what was being said.

That is all totally welcome, but there were a few comments that really got cruel and personal and just laid out these personal attacks on marine.

In in a really just rage filled way that was completely unnecessary.

It made me really mad to read and it was really stressful for marine in an already very stressful time for her and it was just very upsetting.

And yeah, I just I.

Really won't stand for that.

I mean, I know, I know that we can't really control how people engage in our space.

Actually, we can control how people engage in our space 'cause we can just delete the comments.

So I don't know from now.

On I'm going to be.

Laying down well, I'm not, I'm not.

But if people are taking cruel personal attacks that aren't just talking about the ideas, yeah, yeah, I think that's that's just not OK.

Anyway, I will leave you with that and also, one thing that is going to come out of this, which I think is really productive, is that now we have the opportunity to take these criticisms levied at the anti imperialist left and think about them and.

Talk about them.

With other people and and expand the conversation.

And so today we're going to be addressing some of those points with Josh about Rojava and with Ronnie as well.

We will be trying to take a look at some of these criticisms, and to what?

Extent they are.

Valid to what extent?

You know we can, we can discuss them and build a stronger way.

Sorry, that was cheesy. Come anyway on with the interview. Before we start, I just wanted to remind everyone that if you'd like to support the show, you can sign up to be a monthly Patreon on our website, veganvanguardpodcast.com.

Or you can throw us a one time donation via PayPal, which you can also find on our website.

In the support section or at the bottom of every post.

So I think I've covered everything I wanted to cover.

Perhaps not the most ridiculously, but without further ado, let us get into the interview.

So, Josh, welcome to the show.

JOSH: Thanks very much.

MEXIE: All right.

So before we get started, I think it would be good if you could just introduce yourself and give us a bit of a.

Brief history and perhaps what your leftist tendency?

Is if you follow any.

JOSH: Yeah, OK. I'm, I'm Josh Walker. I'm, I'm from southwest Wales in the UK. I was a member of the YPG for some time in 2016. These days I work in a factory.

Uh, me and I?

In terms of my leftist tendency, I'd.

It it's hard to say.

I, you know, I I'm, I'm more of a floating, floating leftist.

I agree with some kind of more anarchist principles, a lot of the kind of traditional, uh, labor movement stuff in the UK, you know, we have a long history of.

Workers and peasants resistance and all that kind of thing, especially in Wales and.

And, you know, there's something, so I'm a little more authoritarian something, so I'm a little more libertarian.

So I I often make the joke of being a Marxist of the Groucho variety.

MEXIE: Yeah, no, that sounds sounds good.

I mean, I'm I'm kind of all about the non sectarian leftist sticks, so floating floating leftists, I think that's a new term.

JOSH: Yeah, I I just sorry.

Back then.

Just to sum it up quickly, I think if if you if you're 4 workers having more rights, more control and a better life, I'm with you.

If you're against that, I'm not.

Not to not to be too much for George Bush about it, but yeah.

MEXIE: Oh, fantastic.

I think that's something that everyone can get behind, hopefully if you're listening to this show.

Uhm, OK, so let's dive into questions about Rojava.

So I think that most of our listeners are leftists perhaps, or at least have some working knowledge of Rojava and the Kurdish resistance.

But that might not be the case.

So I think it would be good to start.

By providing some context for what we'll be talking about.

So, assuming a completely lay audience, could you give some background information about the Kurdish freedom movement?

And the importance of defending Rojava?

And could you also perhaps lay out who the major players are and how they relate to one another? Because there are a.

Lot of acronyms floating around that might be confusing for people who aren't fully versed.

JOSH: 1st in this stuff like there's the.

Of define, ask, PYD, YPG, YPG.

It all gets a bit confusing at times.

OK, yeah, yeah, it it really does come.

So I I mean, firstly, no one should feel too bad about that 'cause, I had a Turkish Kurdish lecturer who did a a thing on the YPG specifically and and she confused a lot of the acronyms, so it's it's perfectly natural.

Essentially, I guess brief history of it would be back in the 70s though.

Was, uh, well, Kurdish resistance goes back in the in the area like couple of centuries and everything.

But really the modern kind of Kurdish freedom movement, as you say, has its origins in the 70s with the military dictatorship in Turkey, they murdered a lot of student leftists.

And stuff like that.

They massacred people at a music festival, all this kind of stuff.

And in that context, a group of students.

Including Abdullah, Agile and and many others, Kurdish and Turks alike established the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party of course, PKK being the Kurdish acronym.

And yeah, and they essentially started an armed struggle because among the other things.

The the dictatorship was doing, they were repressing Kurdish identity in the interests of creating a kind of monocultural Turkish state.

And I mean this goes back to the founding under artistic but.

You know, it was particularly, particularly strong in those days.

So, so yeah, Kurdish people could speak their language, you know, it was banned.

They can educate their children and other, you know, identifiers of well, Kurdish identity were being suppressed and basically over the last 40 years.

They've fought this armed rebellion.

So so there's all that going on in Turkey.

MEXIE: So the cake is the workers.

Party the Kurdish Workers Party.

JOSH: Yeah, a partir katkar and couldn't stand.

It's yeah.

Uhm, is it?

So they're they're kind of the progenitors of a lot of the left Kurdish freedom movements, you know, in Iran, Iraq, Syria and of course Turkey.

So then when?

Well, firstly when there was a riot and a kind of massacre of Kurds.

At a football stadium in Commish low, I think it was back in 2006, something like that.

Followers of the CVE, or the founder of the PKK ideology, set up their own party in Syria, called the PYD the.

Democratic Union Party of Kurdistan and the the YPG is essentially the armed wing of that, and they were quite quiet until of course the whole Arab Spring thing broke out.

There was the revolution in Syria and essentially.

The PYD used this opportunity to rise up, take control of the Kurdish areas and face.

It's by, you know, so many enemies on so many fronts.

The government essentially retreated to the core and pulled their soldiers out of most of the Kurdish areas and basically, with a little bit of fighting but not much conceded, most of, you know, the Kurdish areas of the north.

You know, except for a few areas around, like the security kind of the the hub of the security state in cities like Qamishli, hasker, so on and so forth.

So so that that's, yeah that's essentially where the PKK YPG kind of came from.

You also have in northern Iraq, you know you have the KRG which is the Kurdistan Regional Government that has two major parties in it essentially kind of in the context the center.

The right party, the KDP, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Center Left Party, the PUK, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan there more.

Capitalist, especially the the KDP, KDP is, you know, the current ruling party there.

They're quite, you know, a corrupt sort of family like run by the Barzani family kind of organization.

They're often hostile to the PKK, the YPG and all these.

Because obviously they're a threat to their power as well and they work with Turkey on this basis and all this kind of stuff.

MEXIE: And the YPG is the women's armed version of the YPG, correct?

JOSH: Yeah, essentially so. From from the UM.

From the initialisms acronyms or whatever that you mentioned earlier, the DFNS is the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria.

That's the official name of what is often called Russia, because Russia ever means just West in Kurdish, and they thought that was too exclusionary.

That it referring to the areas where Java eventually, especially as it expanded into Arab areas, was kind of enforcing a Kurdish identity on it.

And as you know the the ideology of of the Kurdish freedom movement had kind of evolved from kind of Marxist Leninist National Liberation struggle kind of thing to more of a multi ethnic kind of ideology.

Although there were.

There were always elements of that, of course.

I mean Marxism is generally, you know, internationalist and all that kind of.

Thing, but they they kind of wanted something that that expressed that better and that that was, you know, more that they kind of said that it wasn't just about establishing a W Kurdistan, but more of a, you know, a a free area that happened to include a lot of Kurds, but also.

Uhm, also Arabs, Turkmens, Syrians and so on and so forth.

The SDF is the Syrian democratic forces there.

But they're essentially the military of the DFNS, and the YPG are probably the largest militia within that broader alliance, which is made-up of not just the YPG and the YPG, but also a lot of rebel generally.

Arab militias and so on, and new militias that have been formed as they liberate areas from ISIS and.

So on and so forth.

MEXIE: OK, so that's so interesting.

So should we, should we refer to it as a democratic federation of northern Syria and not Rojava?

JOSH: Really, yes, it's difficult because it's become such a, you know, it's kind of become an established thing that it's rush hour and and, you know, a lot of the other foreign volunteers like myself will generally refer to it that way and so on and so forth.

But really it is the DFNS or the federation.

Whatever I I sometimes like to.

Call it the federation just because I'm a massive Star Trek nerd.

It feels better, you know, fighting for the federation, yeah.

MEXIE: Yeah, that's so interesting.

I've really only heard it referred to as Rojava, just generally popularly on the left.

But you're right that that does kind of put in your mind that it is.

Really a Kurdish thing?

Yeah, very interesting.

So I guess, like kind of gets into the next question about Democratic confederalism or communalism, the ideology that really drives the PYD in, like the DFNS, I suppose.

Could you explain a bit about what?

Their ideology actually is, and how they came to accept it as a foundational political principle.

JOSH: Uhm, essentially it's a democratic confederalism.

Is essentially a system of direct democracy that's based on building, building things up from a, you know, a ground level like a neighborhood kind of Council level to, you know, larger community cities and then cantons and so on and so forth with representation.

For all genders or races or religions and stuff kind of built in as part of it, you know, they're not afraid to use quotas, and that's quite an important part of it because.

It's, you know?

Because there is always the risk that people get isolated. It's all well and good to have a ideology that kind of expresses, you know, say, women's liberation or tolerance of minorities. But in reality, as we've seen many times, people who can express those things maybe don't believe.

Them genuine, genuinely.

And the best way to ensure rights for minorities, for women and so on and so forth, is to have them actually making the decisions that affect them, you know, because, yeah, like I said, we we've all seen recently what powerful men, sadly often do.

So yeah, it's not counting for that one.

So that that's kind of the basis of it and obviously it prefers a cooperative ownership and so on so forth for various strategic and tactical reasons.

The DFNS, as it were, doesn't push so hard on the kind of socialist economics of it, even though socialism.

And ecology and all that kind of stuff is a very important part of it in the actual expression of it, in the actual practice, there's there's less of that because of the needs to.

Essentially, the needs to in the way I see it is the need to avoid the powerful interests in society destabilizing things when.

Yeah, well, essentially to to express it.

They they, you know, they have collectivized some farms or whatever, or or change things around when there's the opportunity, but.

They prefer to do things by consensus and and convincing people and stuff rather than just forcing things on them.

Partially because powerful patriarchs of clans in in the region and so forth have a lot of men at their disposal, a lot of men that that fought for ISIS previously, that fought for the FSA.

That that you know it's, it's a very.

A strong thing that that in the in the region a lot of these people will side with who they think is in their best.

Interests at the time.

And so in order to not risk open rebellion in the areas they've they've liberated, they take more of a softer approach on that kind of thing.

MEXIE: Uhm, could you explain a bit how their governance model works?

Like how do they organize their direct democracy etc.

JOSH: So in in areas and in areas under their control, Libre it liberated by the YPG.

However you want to express it, they generally set up a I forget the word for it, but but like a a community house, a Community council space, UM.

And they they usually have party members, party functionaries who will go out in the area, go and ask people you know what they need, what their problems are, what problems they're facing and invite them into the the Councils essentially, and the Councils run on.

You know, a direct, democratic kind of way where people, you know, suggest things and everyone votes on it and all that kind of thing.

And there's a classic kind of Soviet stuff in the original sense of, you know, having those like workers councils, having unions, councils for women.

And women issues, you know, a lot of the women there will be married mothers and face certain things in society and so on and so forth.

So they, you know, set up councils for that.

MEXIE: Yeah, so you kind of touched on it a bit there, but I wanted to ask, how are feminist ideals incorporated into their praxis because I know there is a strong focus on feminism when anyone talks about Rojava or the Kurds?

JOSH: Yes, so there's obviously the Yekîneyên Parastina Jin, which is the YPJ, the women's protection units, so that's a big part of it, they set up a lot of women's houses which are, it's hard to describe, I've been to a couple for a short amount of time, but they're essentially some sort of mix between family planning advice centre, domestic violence shelter and a barracks, in some cases. Because it's a very violently patriarchal society in many ways and so you kind of have this sort of thing where a woman will escape a forced marriage or a violent home and come to the woman's house and the father, the brothers, the husband and his father and brothers and everything will come along to try and get them back and when a woman with a machine gun pops up on the roof, they generally reconsider.

In that sense they're taking a very direct woman controlled approach to facing these things head-on, it's one thing that they don't compromise with, on economics that's one thing, but they do not compromise on the women's rights, and that sometimes bring them into opposition with the more you

know conservative and patriarchal elements of society, but the kind of benefits are there that generally all you get out of it is just you know the old husband's complaining that they can't tell their wives or daughters anything anymore.

Yeah so there's that and in the actual councils there's a 40% gender quota so essentially if there's you know 60% women on a council on the larger councils there aren't allowed to be any more there's forty percent men as the rest the council and likewise if there's sixty percent men then there has to be 40% women and this they will do things like you know they will delay the council meeting until all these men who have come and said oh well my wife couldn't come because she's busy they tell the man to go home do whatever work the woman was supposed to be doing and sent the woman to the council otherwise they won't help them sort of thing so yeah it's very important part of the practice and is the thing that they're most successful at.

MEXIE: That's really great.

I remember hearing that I think last year and I was just like, wow, I was just really impressed because, I mean, we don't even do that in the West.

JOSH: They're far more radical than us and I think they've on on on families and and I think they've got the right of it, but.

There's also things like one of my commanders, in fact most of my best commanders out there were women, at varying different levels, so this is another thing, at all levels of the hierarchy there are a man and a woman with a kind of equal position, but the woman can give orders to men.

So, you know, like, like my equivalent of a captain, I suppose could order around the, you know, platoons of male soldiers in the YPG.

But a man cannot do the same to the woman.

They can suggest to the YPG that they should do something and, you know, often.

They're in the interests of fighting the same war or whatever, so they'll do it, but they can't command them.

They can't order them if a if a if a male YPG member commits a offense against uh, why PJ?

It's the why PJ and their command structure that deal with it, and there's nothing we can do about it, so.

Say this is very unlikely to happen.

And but, you know, men being men say a man was sexually assault a member of the YPJ.

Then the YPJ could come along with their rifles and everything, drag him off and punish him in whatever the way they saw fit, and we wouldn't be allowed to raise a finger or or protest. You know, it's it's.

Deal with and.

Not for us.

MEXIE: Wow, that's really incredible.

I mean, not that I want to see people, just.

Brutalizing men or anything.

Like that, but just the idea.

That you know that men cannot command the women in the same way I.

Think that's remarkable?

JOSH: Yeah, I mean, people often joke that.

Uhm the the why PJ 'cause if if you assault as why PJ? They could just drag you off and shoot you and does not quite true, but they're a lot more likely to say platformer man, where essentially they have to stand in front of like all the YPJ in the region.

Well, each one lays out exactly why what they did was wrong at great length and like kind of shame them in front of everyone.

That's quite a common punishment for sort of intermediate kind of crimes or offences or whatever crimes isn't quite the right word for some things that you would.

Get that kind of treatment for but.

MEXIE: Wow, unbelievable.

Uhm, so along this line, what would you say to the concern or the critique raised that feminism or the idea of feminism here might just be being used as a military strategy?

JOSH: Well, in some ways I I've already implicitly answered this by pointing out how in some ways other elements are played down as part of a.

A military political strategy?

Uhm, it would be a lot.

I mean, they're not fighting.

They're not fighting a civil war in.

I don't know.

Right.

And then that reference won't make sense to you.

It's there's probably the most liberal town in in Britain.

They're not fighting a civil war in, say, Portland, right?

They're they're fighting one in the Middle East when there has been a.

On an intensely a series of intensely patriarchal the terrorist groups and so on in the region.

And an intensely patriarchal society, it would actually probably be more militarily and politically convenient for them to downplay the feminism and not push it so hard.

As soon as they move into a region and do all of that kind of stuff it it would raise.

Far fewer issues.

Like the idea they're just using it as a military strategy.

That's what the military strategy that that's what the military struggle.

Well, there is fundamentally that that for for.

The kind of followers of Abdullah and the founder of the PKK, who's probably one of the main well heating it.

Probably he is the main ideological architect of this whole thing to to them.

And then there's other, you know, there's there's other theorists within the Kurdish freedom movement and all that kind of thing and.

He took influence from other places, but he's the most important one.

To kill the dominant male is the fundamental principle of socialism, is one of his sayings.

It's it's like the entire thing is about how the subjection of women in the first instance is where all other forms of slavery and subjection and everything come from.

And the.

The the social idea of of men is being dominant.

Doesn't just stop in the home, it it originates there, but it continues onto a strong man, subjecting those who are weaker than him.

Uh, a strong nation subjecting those that are weaker than them.

And so on and so forth.

And and when a when a boy in his home sees his mother being subjected.

In this way?

You know, then he will go out into society and believe that that's the way to behave in general.

It's a fundamental foundational principle of, yeah, the whole thing.

So it's, you know, it's essentially like saying it's their military strategy to fight.

MEXIE: But yeah, so you're saying what you're saying is that the whole point of the military being involved at all is to fight for feminist and socialist values, not that those values are being.

Used to kind of paint the resistance as something other than what it is.

JOSH: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. Yeah.

MEXIE: So along the same lines of, you know, criticism of this movement, the PYD has been accused of being a problematic party and that they repress opposition to the democratic and federalist experiment.

How would you respond to that?

JOSH: Well, one.

Of the.

The the main opposition formations now, so the the actual governing party so to speak of the DFNS is tab dam, which is kind of short for TFG democratic the movement for a democratic society.

Which is actually a coalition of parties in the.

Kind of in the region current coalition parties organisations you know trade unions, civil society organisations that exist there and you know a lot of the the PYD is still the biggest one, kind of similar to how the the YPG is in the SDF.

So so there is opposition within it and.

And in a kind of non factional basis, there is opposition.

To, you know, particular policies or whatever, but one of the main opposition groupings outside of that is the, I believe it's the ENKS and I can't remember what that stands for, but it's essentially a grouping that's allied with the KDP in.

In northern Iraq or southern Kurdistan?

Who have blockaded?

Uh, who've blockaded Rajeeva, who've arrested our comrades, throwing them in prison with ISIS members, tortured them, committed a whole variety of horrendous crimes.

And they are.

And like, you're going to get a different response for me because I am, at the end of the day, a combat veteran.

And that does do some nasty things to your psyche at some degree.

But I'm.

Not that bothered about traitors getting like actual genuine, like agents and traitors being arrested and stuff like that.

Like it?

They can call themselves an opposition group all they want, but that that's to make it sound more innocent than than it often is now, and a lot of the time.

When they are repressed, when they are arrested and so on and so forth, it's exactly in response to, say by Fiji operatives or supporters being arrested.

In the Kurdistan Regional Government, and they're essentially used for prisoner exchanges and stuff like that.

Like there there were lots of places where we knew there were people who were KDP supporters and and they they were, you know, they they that's what they believed in and that was fine.

They went around, they did their normal business.

They didn't try to.

It's difficult because a lot of what I'm going to say can sound a little bit like euphemisms, you know?

Like, like throughout history, people have justified terrible things by saying, you know, Oh well, they were undermining the revolution.

Oh well, they were, you know, traitors and spies and so on and so forth.

But those people do genuinely exist.

And in these, in these situations, they can be very, very dangerous.

And and there are times when people can go beyond just being opposed to the idea to dangerously undermining it while you're in a state of war.

Like that's what people have to remember.

Is this is a real revolution in the real world, faced with real problems that have to make real, difficult decisions?

You know, we also repress the opposition by arresting ISIS members like you have to.

Remember, they are.

Political opposition in the region, just as.

You know, Nazi soldiers and Nazi sympathizers and collaborators were European opposition parties as the allies and, you know, as as the Allies liberated Europe that they arrested and often executed these people like the at least, you know they don't do that.

And and.

Sometimes a more soft approach, these kind of things could get your people killed and and you have to be careful.

About that.

That's that's what I would.

Say about that.

MEXIE: Yeah, I think that was really well said.

And what you're saying about people need to realize that this is a real life revolution that's happening right now and.

And I think to expect people in that situation, in such a volatile situation, to be ideologically pure in every single way.

Way or just pure in action in every single way.

Is just is.

Really unrealistic.

I mean not to excuse any, you know any.

Bad things that are going on.

JOSH: No, I.

MEXIE: To say it mildly, but but yeah.

JOSH: I I feel I should point out.

At this this point as well that the the YPG is one of the few militias in the area, one of the few armies and and the the the FNS as a whole like.

US that punishes people who commit, you know, war crimes and so on within their own site.

Like people get arrested for executing prisoners, for looting houses, for for driving people out of their homes when there's no good reason and.

And I know good reason for driving people out of their homes.

It also doesn't sound good.

But there are like real times when you have to be like, no, you need to leave because this area is about to get like really badly bombarded and you're going to die.

So you have to leave kind of.

Thing, but but there's also, you know, guys who it's a civil war and everyone knows what happens in that kind of thing.

And there are some really terrible people who get involved in that kind of thing and want to, you know, it's a classic thing, the, uh, neighbor who's coveted there.

So a person who's coveted their neighbors garden, you know, when the Civil War breaks out, they find some excuse of like, well, he's a Shia or whatever.

So they go in, they kill them, and they take their land away.

But that kind of thing would be very, very seriously punished by the YPG, whereas it isn't by any of the other facts.

Uhm, so.

MEXIE: Right.

I mean, like in all of their, as far as I know, in in all of their kind of actions and dealings they seem.

To be at least.

More conscious or or more conscious and trying to make sure that what they're doing aligns with their overall political principle of of democratic confederalism.

JOSH: Yeah, and also just kind of being decent.

Sure, like.

MEXIE: Yeah, right.

So you mentioned ISIS and you know a bit about these quote UN quote opposition parties. So could you explain who are the main threats to Curtis self-determination and which groups are attacking them and why, and what are their interests?

JOSH: I shall well.

The the threat of ISIS is basically gone now.

I mean, they could by some miracle come back, but it it's unlikely at this point.

Turkey is kind of the main.

Turkey is the main one.

I mean, the states in the area that control what is, you know, traditionally Kurdistan or whatever.

So Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran are all, for their own reasons, opposed to Kurdish.

Self-determination, autonomy or independence, anyone of of those sort of thing.

Turkey is the most powerful, the most dedicated to this kind of thing, has the largest Kurdish population, and is the one that is attacking DFNS right now.

You know they.

They they they have the second largest army in NATO, they have Western support.

They have all.

This kind of stuff, and they've been practiced.

At it for a long time, having fought, you know, having fought the PKK for the last 40 years, yeah.

So that they're essentially Turkey is the biggest problem.

Uhm, the others maybe can be dealt with more, I think, you know, like for example, Assad might decide to come to terms with.

Live with the YPG or whatever and allow them some autonomy because the war's been so long and costly that.

But like.

You know, they they may just decide that negotiating with a faction that's willing to negotiate is more worthwhile than just leveling, like what's left of the country sort of thing.

The Iraqis, you know, they have some problem with the their Kurdish population there, but they, you know, they they still have a.

Could stand regional government and all that kind of thing.

I let I know less about Iran, to be quite honest.

I know that the Kurds and especially Kurdish women were very heavily involved in.

In the recent protests and stuff and and a lot of the stuff about rebelling against the requirement to wear hijab and all that kind of stuff, but and and there are kind of Kurdish rebel groups like Pejak, which is essentially the PKK in Iran.

Who exist there, but they're they're not, as you know, they're not strong or as influential as either, say, the PKK or the YPG is in their particular areas.

MEXIE: So what is Turkey's interest like? Is it just malice or are they trying to annex this area or?

JOSH: It's a bit of a lot of things 'cause it originated in.

Nationalism is one of the reasons why the the Kurdish Freedom movement as it is isn't strictly nationalist is because they look at the examples of Turkey and Israel, among others, and point out how.

The establishment of a state of a nation state for an ethnicity, for an identity.

Pretty much necessitate repressing, expelling, and mistreating anyone who doesn't fit that mults so that this is what nationalist ideology does, you know?

So when Turkey, the Ottoman Empire had a system where the different nations were allows autonomy and so on and so forth with it within.

Within the empire, but when?

That changed to a modern unitary nation state called Turkey for Turks sort of thing that resulted in the genocide of the Armenians with some help from Kurds, as it happens.

And they're they're very they they feel it's very important to point that out, you know that that.

All sorts of people can be suckered into this, you know, they're not just like some kind of victim ethnicity sort.

Thing and so yeah, so Turkey in in that sense is like like the kind of deep state of Turkey and so on are interested in it for that reason, for creating this this this nation state for everyone and his kind of his type, they're slightly neo Ottoman IST like they.

Believe not just in the Turkish nation state, but that that should.

Establish dominance within the Muslim world that you know they should try and reclaim areas that were previously controlled by the Ottoman Empire or by Turks, which includes, you know, those areas of Syria and Iraq and so on and so forth they also want to prevent.

The establishment of of a base for PKK operations within Turkey in neighboring can.

Trees and I believe there's a a decent amount of natural resources in the Turkish part of Kurdistan as well, which you know and there's loads of oil, productive farm lands and so on and so forth in northern Syria.

So they have a bunch of different ideological and geopolitical kind of realist interests in the region. So it basically.

The results in across a massive cross section of the Turkish governing part of society, having an interest in suppressing Kurdish rebellions wherever they happen and expanding Turkish control and influence in.

The Middle East.

MEXIE: OK, thank you for that.

I I always wondered.

Like why is your Turkey care so much about this?

So could you give some detail?

About the attacks on Kobani and is it Afrin or Afrin?

JOSH: Afrin yeah, or Afrin I.

MEXIE: Afrin and explain their importance.

JOSH: Think it is, yeah.

Uhm, so when it comes to Kobani, do you mean the the battle with ISIS or?

Oh yeah, well, so essentially, uhm when was it 2014, 2015? I've forgotten?

But when?

Basically, when ISIS was on the up, uhm.

They kind of seemed unstoppable. Oh yeah, so it's 2014. September 2014. This was happening. ISIS was on the right.

They kind of seemed unstoppable.

They just want victory after victory after victory.

They decided in I I think August.

Of 2014 to invade, then the YPG controlled areas for for a number of reasons. You know, because they see them as the atheist PKK, even though there's a variety.

City of people of different religions there and everything.

So they invaded.

They invaded what were at the time essentially just the Kurdish areas of Syria controlled by the YPG, and they pushed up quite far to the city of Kobani, which is in the center of the northern border of Syria.

To the border with Iraq and to not Iraq.

Sorry, Syria and Turkey and the when they got to the city, the YPG decided that this far and no further was kind of going to be their approach, that they would fight the hardest they could come to repel.

Isis from the city, and they gave the best resistance to ISIS that anyone had seen at this point.

You know, Mosul had fallen basically without a fight.

The ISIS had taken cities like Falluja and so on and we're just, you know, progressing and progressing and progressing and and the people they face.

Would often just be too scared and run away.

But the the kind of approach of the YPG was these are fascists.

We have to stop them.

This will be the Stalingrad of our conflict sort of thing.

And with like ridiculously outnumbered, you know it, it varies that at some point there was like a couple of 100 YPG members in the city and like 7000 ISIS attacking them and stuff.

You know, I think those numbers grew as people like came across from the the border from Turkey and all that kind.

Of stuff, and there was.

You know, it varies, and it's hard to establish direct numbers, but they were ridiculously outnumbered.

ISIS had tanks and artillery and all this kind of stuff, and the YPG essentially had themselves some grenades, and there a case, maybe a couple of rocket launchers and this kind of thing.

There was loads of ridiculous heroics, you know, like.

Aaron Mercan, who blew herself up in the middle of ISIS convoy as they were about to overrun her squad position, so she was a squad leader.

She told her squad to retreat and just like ran into their armored personnel carriers and everything blew them up and destroyed quite a few.

Those all this kind of thing, people just they they were just holding on for dear life.

And they managed to, they were losing the city slowly, but they were holding ISIS back and managing to reclaim areas of the city or reclaimed strategic hills that there's like three large hills around the city that gave a good.

View of it and all that kind of thing.

They managed to lose them and recapture them and all this kind of stuff and you know this, this was a big.

Thing because it it.

It demonstrated to people that ISIS could be fought and they maybe even could be stopped.

And then when the Americans decided to step in and started dropping airstrikes on the ISIS tanks and their artillery and everything, that tipped the the tide of battle in favor of the YPG and it was over.

At that point, basically they drove ISIS back and basically haven't stopped since then.

So it was the turning point in the war against ISIS.

Before that, ISIS, you know, was essentially undefeated.

And after that it was the kind of.

If it bleeds, we can kill it sort of moment.

So, so that's why Kobani is really important and kind of symbolic, especially to kids and that kind of thing.

Afrin itself was a Canton. So, so kind of DFNS is made-up of three cantons of Kobani Jazeera in the east.

And uh.

Afrin in the West and Afrin has been isolated.

The they haven't been able to, you know, they haven't been able to liberate the areas between them in Manbij and them in Afrin.

And so and the Americans are basically only giving support and aircraft.

The east of the Euphrates, whereas Manbij is West.

So the Turks seeing, you know, the success of the YPG, especially after they took Raqqa, that supposed capital of ISIS, the Turks decided, OK, we've got to do something about this now and we've got to essentially weaken the YPG.

And strengthen the kind of jihadist rebel factions that that Turkey supports in the region and kind of strengthen their hand in the negotiations that are going to come up or or the in progress at the moment.

So yeah, they invaded Afrin, which which had managed.

Even though they hadn't managed to reach their comrades in the east, they had managed to essentially keep out all other factions.

You know, they've been attacked by loads of different people and they've managed to keep everyone out there taken in something like 150,000 refugees.

Which is doubling the population of the the Canton UM.

All this kind of thing.

So it was kind of a more peaceful area and now all those people have been made refugees again as the Turks invaded the the YPG put.

Up a really?

Good fight at first, but the superior numbers and again the superior equipment of of the Turkish army, the Turkish Air Force.

And all that kind of stuff and the jihadist al.

They were able to eventually overrun Afrin and and towards the end, like before, before the actual city of Afrin.

I thought it was going to be a horrendous bloody battle and Afrin would end up leveled.

But as it as it came to it, the YPG pulled out of the city because the.

Essentially, human cost would have been far too high, so they they switched from fighting as they were in a very conventional style, to now fighting a sort of guerrilla.

War in in the region.

Yeah, so that's that's a big important thing because, you know, it's the Turks invading Syria and repressing the Kurds again and replacing the feminist democratic model with an Islamist, extremely patriarchal and brutal kind of situation that we have.

Now, you know, the Governing Council of Afrin, as it stands under the Turks, is all men.

There have been women going missing, there have been Yazidis are forced to convert to Islam or executed and all this kind of.

Thing and the horrendous crimes against people that I won't even go into.

MEXIE: Yeah, that's really horrific and I mean I guess it just kind of as you said, the threat of ISIS is diminishing and now the threat of Turkey is is really real.

JOSH: Yeah, and and Turkey had been helping ISIS for ages, and shooting at, shooting at the YPG over the border and stuff like that.

They sent like police into.

Into Kobani once because like just over the border, because they were building like a border wall and people were protesting against it and all that kind of thing.

A few of.

My friends got tear gassed in that.

Uhm well.

And that was before Afrin.

So they they've been interfering all the time.

They've been allowing ISIS to cross the border and attack the YPG from behind.

Most of the ISIS fighters come through Turkey and and for a while they were sort of collaborating and so on.

MEXIE: OK. So and you just mentioned that some of your friends were tear gassed.

So I was wondering if you could talk a bit about your time in the YPG?

What motivated you to join their struggle and to fight with them, and what were you involved with mainly?

JOSH: Uhm, so I joined essentially because.

I felt, you know, it was an unusual, revolutionary thing when, you know, especially when you consider the radically feminist aspects of it.

All that kind of thing I had a lot of sympathies for for their cause, and I felt it is kind of two things.

On the one hand, I felt there was a lot that we could learn from them that I wanted to see for myself if what I was hearing about it was true, and that I felt, you know, it was in such a

Desperate situation that if I claim, how could I claim to support it without actually doing anything to support it?

You know what I mean.

And of course, you know, I always mentioned the influence of the volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, many of whom were from Wales and so on and so forth.

And so I kind.

Of felt inspired by their example.

And, you know, proper spirit of internationalist solidarity.

Uhm, while I was there, I spent.

I spent six months there.

I was in various areas of the country I was generally in.

I was in two different units while I was there.

And most of the time I was, I was essentially a translator for other foreign volunteers that were with me because I've, you know, I grew up essentially bilingual and pretty good at picking up languages and stuff like that.

Although where my Kurdish pronunciation is a bit off these days.

But yeah, that's.

That's essentially it.

I was, you know, I was involved in some fighting against ISIS from time to time when they came to attack.

Got bombed by the Turkish Air Force.

Uh, and yeah, that's it.

It involves a lot of sitting around drinking Chai and smoking cigarettes.

MEXIE: Yeah, I mean, I, I like, which is what you said there about, you know, being inspired by the Spanish Civil War, but also.

Thinking about you know what, what can we learn from them and and also wanting to see what is it actually like on the ground because I, I agree, I mean we hear so much in the West kind of second hand, but it's hard to know exactly how things are operating so.

Yeah, I think that's.

Really remarkable that you went over.

So in terms of America's help, I know you mentioned that they were providing.

Or they were bombing ISIS at Kobani, etc. There's been a real divide on the left in terms of how people feel about the YPG forming strategic alliances with the US and also with the Assad regime in Russia. So could you briefly explain the US and Russian?

Motivations for cooperating with or offering tactical support to the YPG, and what do you think the implications of this are?

JOSH: Well, as a kind of third party in the conflict, the.

Well the I say third party is like 4th or 5th party, but the essentially throughout the whole course of the war there have been times when each faction has kind of.

Had an implicit understanding with each of the others for a limited kind of tactical reason.

So, for example, the YPG and the Assad regime.

Cooperating or not attacking each other.

More accurately, when ISIS or the rebels are attacking them and vice versa, you know they could.

Because there are obviously a lot of rebel factions within the SDF who were with the YPG and everything that they have been opposed to Assad and they have 4.

Him and they're they're ideologically different.

They're ideologically conflicting.

But you know, just all out war with everyone all the time will just lead to you losing and then uniting against you.

So you know every like I said every factions had to balance all that very carefully.

In terms of the Super powers and the foreign powers, 'cause there's is more than just US and Russia.

You know, Iran are involved, Turkey of course is involved, the Saudis, the Jordanians, all that kind of thing.

Basically everyone, you know, Europeans as well, every everyone with an interest in the region in some way.

Has a hand in the.

Conflict, but yeah, to keep it simple with Russia.

Uh, you know, it's the same thing they they haven't given that much help to the YPG, that much help and support.

And when it came down to it, Afrin was in the Russian sphere of influence, so to speak.

And they left, left it to the Turks to, you know, make an agreement with them over goose or whatever, like, again, is all all this?

Trading and politics going on? Uhm, with the US, it's.

It's again a similar thing of where, you know the the YPG on US pets. You know, they're not a US creation like, say, the Contras in Nicaragua or something. They entered into a kind of limited tactical alliance because their interests aligned.

During the fight against ISIS and and we can see this from from how the US also, which is, you know, it's not only in NATO but it's essentially the leading Member because you know, the US is the hegemonic power in the world at the moment for how much longer is another.

Question and that's something.

Different, uh, and and so they could have.

Opposed Turkey more strongly.

They could have, you know, done more about it, but they didn't.

And and and similar.

With Britain and stuff, they're more interested in cozying up to Turkey for for trade reasons. the US is more interested in them because their because they control the boss for us, so they're strategically.

Important when it comes to Russia and all this kind of stuff in terms of how.

Leftists criticise it.

If they're consistent, then they will also criticise the Nazi Soviet Pact, which was used to essentially buy buy time by having a nonaggression pact, not an alliance with with the Nazis, and which, of course, the Nazis broke 'cause you can't trust.

And they accepted military aid and alliance with with the major imperialist powers of the world at that time to to fight the to fight the fascists and because they recognize that the fascists were the existential threat at that point that that that, you know.

You can say what you like about imperialists and capitalists and they can turn into fascists in with relative ease, but.

But the the out and out violent aggressive fascists are the biggest threat and and I that is what ISIS represents in this in this context, you know, so so if if they're consistent and they they criticise those things with the full awareness of exactly what they are and what that involved.

Then you know I'll still disagree with them, and I'll still pray to God that they never have to make any strategic decisions in their life.

But I'll I'll have a bit more respect for that, for people who just criticise the YPG because, you know, America is the great Satan and you have to oppose absolutely everything they do.

All the time.

Even when they like for once in their lives actually do the right thing, you know, in a kind of.

Stopped clock sort.

Of way.

Then I I just think it's stupid like it.

It's again the kind of thing of not recognizing the reality of the situation that, like I said before about Kobani.

The YPG were on the verge of getting overrun.

Women were going to be sold into slavery.

People who were, you know, gay or atheists or agnostics or just not the right kind of Muslims were going to be executed.

The population was going to be brutalized and.

And, you know, the revolution was going to be destroyed.

When the Americans joined, that completely changed and it did save the revolutionary project.

Now they may come to conflict in the future that it's unlikely because, you know, unlike an organization like ISIS, the YPG doesn't have, you know, Globe spanning ambitions or whatever, but like on an ideological level, they are not.

Friends and and they will openly say this and the members of the YPG will openly say this.

It's like, yeah, they're America, but you know, is kind of like Stalin said about the Pope, you know, how many tank divisions has he got, you know, all these various.

Ideologically, supposedly ideologically pure anti imperialist leftists, the how big an Air Force have they?

Got how many ISIS tanks can they destroy?

How many artillery positions can they?

Can they destroy?

And it's a war and you have to make real decisions.

The the.

That affect peoples real lives, that that make the difference between people dying in their thousands or in their hundreds, you know, that's the reality of the situation and if someone has a better alternative, that doesn't result in thousands of people getting massacred, the YPG being destroyed and the whole revolutionary project along with it.

Then you know I'm open to hear it and you can take a time machine and go back and.

Do it that way.

But you know, in the, in the, in the real world.

That was what they had to do, because that's the reality of war.

Uhm, yeah.

MEXIE: Yeah, I mean, I always wonder when people criticize them for accepting help.

I mean, I understand feeling cautious about that.

Or being like you know the US is not doing this.

To be benevolent or to actually help their revolution?

Of course not.

But I always wonder, you know, like the.

Kurdish forces have such limited resources, so.

If they weren't going to get help from the US, then where were they going to get the help?

Where were they going?

Like, like exactly what you said.

What is the alternative?

Like where would they be getting this support?

Because they need it, yeah, yeah.

JOSH: But they're literally surrounded by enemies.

You got Turkey to the north at the time.

They had ISIS all around them, coming from every angle you have to the east of them, the the, you know.

Semi hostile, CDP. You know, Iran's not gonna help them. Uh, Iraq's not really gonna help them up.

There there was no one else.

Russia is not going to help.

China is not going to help.

And you know, there is no.

There is no socialist superpower anymore.

You know.

There is for all the problems of the USSR.

That is essentially what it was.

And they were able to give real material support to real revolutions around the world.

And they did it rather successfully in a lot of.

Cases from that.

Does not exist anymore.

The Russia that exists today is an imperialist.

Capitalist force where the ruling class made their money off looting the USSR and looting the collective property of the Russian people and the the other peoples that were within the USSR.

That is the reality of the people who who you know who who are.

Involved in the world at the moment and China.

China is flexing its muscles more.

You can argue how Marxist they are these days and that days and whatever, they do not occupy the same space that the USSR did and and so.

You know that again?

Yeah, that is the reality of the situation.

That's that.

That's how it is.

MEXIE: And as you said you were Privy to, you know, speaking with people in in the YPG and as far as you heard, obviously nobody was thinking about an alliance with the US being anything more than a strategic, you know one or two time thing.

Or or whatever is needed.

JOSH: You know they.

This is something that kind of annoys me about it as well is it is quite patronizing, like it's that kind of like.

Like it's the sort of thing of, like, well, people in the Middle East, foreign people can't make political rationalists kind of decisions.

They can't.

They're they're naive kind of thing.

It's it's like suggesting that they're naive that this socialist revolutionary group doesn't know what America is.

Like, they're well aware of it and they they are not naive.

And a lot of the people you know, there's a lot of stupidity in the YPG.

And I say that in the greatest with the greatest kindness, but it's it's, you know it's it is a.

Militia and all that kind of stuff and all the problems that come with that, but a lot of the people who who were involved in it and who who are commanders and stuff like that are very, very smart people.

And they have made some very good political decisions in a lot of, in a lot of cases, and this is one of it, they are aware of what they're doing.

Yeah, a lot better than a Western leftist, including myself.

You know, they they they know a lot better, you know, than someone in.
An arm chair.

MEXIE: Huh, yeah.

So there have been similar criticisms, which you kind of talked about a bit about the Assad regime, that apparently they're fighting side by side with Assad.

Which is more than at least having this mutual understanding.

What would you say to that?

And do you think it's problematic given what Assad is doing to Syrian civilians outside of Russia?

JOSH: Uhm, this is an interesting thing is that I find criticism because the the leftists such as it is is divided massively on this.

So you get people who are who are super supportive of Assad and see the whole FSA thing as essentially, you know, Western creation like the Contras to destabilize.

The region and serve the interests of this, that and the other.

Then you get people who are.

Uh, left wing, but Pro FSA, super anti Assad and all this kind of thing.

And, you know, there is no doubt that the Assad government has, you know, committed crimes against his people and all that kind of stuff.

And, you know, that goes beyond just fighting the rebellion and.

But the reality is, you know, whichever I I mean.

I have started to believe that the revolution in terms of the FSA.

Now I give you if you ask me.

Uhm, you know, seven years ago, when it started or whatever, I would have given you a different answer.

But today I do see Assad out, just for all.

Because it's not just, you know, Bashar like, going down to each torture chamber and like, ripping people fingernails off or or or firing the buttons on each bomber.

You know, it's it's a.

It's an entire structure and and in some ways Bashar is one of the.

One of the more sane members of the Assad family and and one of the the more reasonable members of the the government.

Uhm, you know, it's the people who run like the Air Force intelligence and stuff who are really brutal.

But yeah, I essentially see him as as a lesser evil these days because the what is left.

The revolution essentially, like basically everyone who was somewhat decent defected to the SDF some time ago or died.

The, the, the, the.

The majority of of what's left with the FSA, especially with the Turkish intervention now, are the most brutal, horrendous.

Islamist gangs that no leftist with any ounce of sanity should be supporting, even on a tactical level, like, even on a you know well, they're opposing someone who I don't like and da, da, da, da, da.

No, they are even more the problem than.

Assad for, you know, Assad, Assad faction has killed the most civilians in the conflict just out of pure ability because the others don't have an Air Force, they don't have the level of, you know, high explosive weapons, artillery and so forth.

And if you're fighting a rebellion, if you're fighting a war like.

In modern war.

For, you know, since since World War Two, I believe it's something like 8090% of all casualties in war have been civilians because it's massive high explosives fighting over populated areas and it kills those people.

And if you have the most of those weapons, you're going to kill the most civilians.

It's not even about, you know?

Uhm, now, in a in an ideal world, I would rather a democratic and federalist system in the whole place.

And, and, you know, no torture, no brutal repressions and executions and all that kind of thing.

That is what I would like, but in the reality after seven years of civil war.

I'm kind of going off on a tangent here, to be honest.

I'll just answer simply and say that the YPG doesn't it's not allied with Assad that they have advanced in the same place at times, but like the rebels ***** Gaston pardoning the rebels gassed.

The the Kurdish neighborhood in the.

So, you know, they've done some really horrible things as well, and in those situations, you can't really blame the YPG forces there for wanting to fight the rebels, being willing to and being willing to not fight on 2 fronts at once to do it, you know, to exploit the ebbs and flows of the war.

But like.

He said the Assad regime and the YPG have fought rhetorically.

They speak against each other all the time.

Recently there's been conflict between the Americans, Russians, the Assad regime and the YPG all fighting at the same time.

You know, is when the the Americans bombed what they call Russian mercenaries.

But what are probably Russian special forces?

Or something or.

You know, or at least Kremlin connected.

So yeah, it's.

Essentially another just to finish this off 'cause I I'm I'm aware that I can ramble a bit.

And go on for quite a while.

But essentially what what a lot of these criticisms and problems come down to is people do not understand how war works.

People react to news in a certain way and dadada.

So they take one example of a thing happening and extrapolate from it and make assumptions about it and, uh, in the same way that people will look at the Nazi Soviet Pact and say, oh, that's an alliance.

Even though the actual terms of it, you can see it's not an alliance, it's a nonaggression pact.

It's a it's a understanding.

And that's even more official than anything that's happened in the Syrian civil war here.

You know, it's it's one shouldn't get ahead of oneself and say, you know, Oh well, there's this.

Individual instance of this.

So it must mean this, this and this and this which you know isn't actually stated by or is it isn't actually demonstrated by what actually happened.

MEXIE: Yeah, no, absolutely.

They treated it as if this this thing invalidates this entire project, you know?

But yeah, I mean re Assad.

I mean, it's completely understandable given that Assad has killed so many more civilians.

You know, it's understandable if for some Syrians their first priority would be Assad and.

Right.

And they would be upset with the YPG having some kind of, you know, agreement, but I think again as you said.

You can't fight a war on all fronts, right?

And so.

So they just don't, they don't have the capacity to be doing that.

And so I yeah, I mean, I think if they want any hope of self-determination at all, they have to work with what they have at the moment.

And what they have at the moment is the Assad regime in power.

JOSH: And if they, if they were, if they were able to remove Assad and, you know, install, uh, a democratic confederal system over the whole country, they would do that.

They would do it tomorrow if they could.

But they said they can't.

This is what they have.

MEXIE: Yeah, absolutely.

Uhm, OK, so I have one final question, and it's again responding to a criticism.

So how would you respond to the criticism of Western leftists who go abroad to fight as being civilizing in a way?

Or that if they want to fight for some kind of anarchist utopia, then they should?

Stay at home and do it there.

JOSH: Well, there's there's a bunch of different.

Responses to this kind of thing if anyone who holds that kind of opinion is still listening.

But I I I don't know and I might risk driving them off now by saying this, but that is essentially an anti left wing position that is not theirs.

It's not a left wing position to say that you cannot be an internationalist, you cannot be an anti racist, you cannot.

You know you cannot hold any or all of these positions and then.

Kind of criticise internationalist cooperation.

Uh, but like I I do get.

I do get where people are coming from on this that that you know with, you know, naming no names and not not putting anything on it.

But some of the volunteers that can go over, you know, a lot of them aren't leftists and don't do it for that reason.

And and sometimes do have kind of.

Neo colonialist attitudes towards the locals that perhaps they picked up when they were there as part of their national army or something like that.

But when I was there, I served in a Kurdish unit.

Under Kurdish commanders or actually that's that's not quite accurate.

It was again a multi ethnic Kurdish Arab and another kind of unit but on.

So I rephrase it.

I served with locals in a local command structure under locals that I had to live with and treat as comrades.

That we fought side by side.

We lost friends side by side.

I didn't go there to tell them how to live their lives.

I went there too.

You know, like I said earlier to to learn from them in many ways that that that I felt that there were things they were they were doing in their struggle that I could bring home and and apply to.

Due to struggles over here, not in the sense of like how to operate a klashnekoff, but like like other things involving how the life goes, how how the democratic and federalist system is is set up and all that kind of thing.

You know, I didn't go there as a kind of.

UM, I don't know, like.

You get some of the very kind of problematic volunteers in Africa who go and basically teach the poor little Africans to like, wash themselves or whatever, and then actually find out that, you know, there are people who kind of know what they're doing and you shouldn't really patronize.

And like that is a, it's a very kind of different thing.

The the, the relations between us were very different to that kind of thing and and the the locals themselves are quite self assured in terms of their identity and then they're more likely to to view us as foreigners as being.

Uh, childish in a way.

Is is like ignorant as as like we need to be shown how to do things because it's that classic thing of when you have foreigners coming in who can't speak a language and people can often think of them as quite stupid.

We see this in in our own communities with people and they they haven't had the.

The same like anti racist campaigns and so on and so forth to to kind of change behaviors like that and and and so so on and so forth.

And again, that would be something that comes out of them, not something that could ever be imposed from outside.

Yeah, you know, so.

So it's it's that's kind of based on a fundamental misunderstanding of exactly how it works, exactly the relations between people and and so on and so forth.

Also, they must, of course think of of Che Guevara as a terrible white savior.

Like middle class Doctor goes on a gap year to the jungles of Guatemala, wherever.

Like, God, why didn't he stay home and did it like, yeah, no.

There's also one more thing to that on this, which is that actually come.

Most of us do.

Those of us who are leftists and are involved in the.

Who, who, who go to join the YPG.

We're workers ourselves, involved in political stuff, a trade union organizers.

Uhm activists and campaigners of all kinds.

Stuff like Anna Campbell, who who was a a British woman who died in Afrin.

She was a very popular kind of anarchist campaigner back at home and she struggled for women rights, for, for the, you know, democratic freedoms again.

You know, kind of police in this state and private property and all that kind of stuff and and and for Palestinian freedom for, you know, quite a lot of other issues that are near and dear to leftists.

And also as part of that she did her what I see as her leftist duty.

In not just being selfish with those kind of things, not just, not, not sticking to national borders established by and for imperialists, for the the power of the powerful, not just sticking to that isolating.

Themselves, but actually engaging in, you know, the workers of the world actually uniting and actually fighting to lose their chains, like that's actually what's happening here.

And and and saying those kind of thing.

Oh well, why don't you just stay at home like people?

People don't understand how the two are linked, how how you can learn things from them, how it's part of it's it's part of leftist struggle that that the more free other people are.

The the more free we are likely to be and all that kind of stuff.

And it is disrespecting people like Anna who fought really really hard for what they believed in at home, fought really really hard for justice at home and fought, fought for it alongside others and ***** died for it.

And and all these people who.

Who want to criticize?

Guys, you know, do half as much as someone like Anna Campbell, do half as much as someone like Michael Israel and then we can talk and and that's that.

I'm done on that.

One really?

MEXIE: No, I think those are really good points.

I mean, it's not an either or.

And as you said within, uh, especially, she did so much at home.

So it's like, yeah, I have been staying home.

I have been staying home and doing it and now I'm I'm coming here to support.

As well.

And yeah I think the point about, you know, learning things from different from different people and different systems is also really important because you know on.

The left we always talk about.

OK, well, what's?

The system of the future.

We need a blueprint.

Like, what's the alternative, right?

And it's like, these are things we have to build together, and.

You have to take cues from one another and see what's working and see what's not working, etc.

And yeah, I mean, unfortunately I think in somewhere like, you know, Britain or Canada.

It's it's harder to think about those alternatives because we don't really have the space.

To be built.

Building anarchist utopias, you know what I mean?

It's just a totally different situation.

JOSH: Yeah, well that's actually just another thing quite quickly is is there is no like they're they're in the middle of a revolution that's actually happening now that needs support.

That needs you know and and you know.

I've been better.

Positioned to talk to other people about it and and spread the message of what they're doing and all that kind of thing.

Because I've actually been there and I've actually seen what.

They're doing and I.

And, you know, speak with a degree of authority on it.

You know, like my knowledge is of course limited because I was one person in a massive area and massive organization and all that.

Kind of stuff, but.

You know, I I I can.

I can do that now and and without this, you know those things would be a lot more limited and we wouldn't necessarily like you say no about what's working about what's not and and and there isn't.

Uh, a revolution happening in Britain and maybe, you know, maybe right now there shouldn't be.

They should, though.

That's that's for other people to decide but the fact is hazen and and so like you say we've got to build things up a bit by bit, get involved in different campaigns different, you know where, where there are problems, say.

With I don't know housing or with you know in in Ireland they they they repealed restrictions on abortion recently and all that kind of things and these these things can all help contribute to the society that we want to build and and.

You know, it's if you're just sitting around.

Waiting for the revolutionary moment.

It's never going to come.

You are just exactly the same as a Christian sitting around waiting for the second coming of Jesus like he ain't coming, man, you you have to go out there and and and, you know, I guess if you're a Christian, I hate.

In the way Jesus would have wanted you to if you're, if you're a socialist, if you.

If you have pretensions of being a revolutionary or someone who wants to see change in society, it's incredibly corny.

But you do to some degree have to help be that change that you want to see like that, that it's it's so trite because it's obvious and true, and that's why everyone quotes that bloody Ghandi quote.

All the time like it is true.

Yeah, and we're not going to get anywhere otherwise.

MEXIE: Yeah, no, absolutely.

I think that's a really great point and I think.

That's probably a good place.

To leave it unless you have any.

Final thoughts to add.

JOSH: Uhm, no there there's nothing.

There's nothing in particular that I can I can really think of just to just to kind of.

Encourage everyone to see past the the problems of, you know, American involvement and the the Shades of Grey that exist in any real life organization.

You know, the YPG, the, the PYD, all that kind of stuff.

They're not pure white and not purely innocent, but they they are better than a lot of the.

Alternatives step by step, you know.

But like like we said, we can build something better.

If we support these kind of things, if we if we help with these kind of things, and if we try to apply some of the things which people do better to our own societies and everything, and eventually Communism will win, I hope.

MEXIE: Yes, I hope, I hope well, that was very well said.

So thank you so much for coming on and and talking about all this today.

I really appreciate.

JOSH: And no problem.

Oh, sorry, can I just say one one more thing?

Very quickly, but I've.

MEXIE: Yes, yes.

JOSH: Just thought of also.

Forget about all the politics and everything if you have the opportunity to help refugees and Syrians, Palestinians and other people, even Ukrainians and so on, who are who are fleeing the conflict now.

No matter what side they were on.

If you can do that, you really should, because fundamentally it's more about humanity than anything else.

MEXIE: That's a really good point.

That's something that Western leftists should be really focusing a lot more attention on at home is opening the borders.

So thank you for that and thanks again for coming on the show.

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