

Video: Syria's President Assad Discusses Syria's Reconstruction, China's "Belt and Road" and US Aggression

China's Phoenix Television

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In the third of recent international interviews, Syria's President Bashar al Assad met with Phoenix Television, to discuss Belt and Road development projects with China's Phoenix Television.

Given that Syria and China are both part of the original Silk Road that created a beautiful explosion of the development and trade that uplifted humanity, this interview has greater importance than the recent one with France's [Paris Match](#) and that with [Rai News 24](#), subsequently banned in Italy. Transcript courtesy of SANA.

Journalist: Mr. President, on behalf of the Chinese television channel, Phoenix, I would like to thank you for giving us this interview.

President Assad: You are welcome.

Question 1: Mr. President, allow me to start straight away... Syria has been able to make great achievements in fighting terrorism and large areas of Syrian territories have been restored. Now, where will you begin the reconstruction of Syria?

President Assad: In fact, we are not waiting for the end of a particular stage of the war in order to start reconstruction; reconstruction starts immediately after the liberation of any area, whether it is big or small, a village or a city. Reconstruction has stages, the first of which is rebuilding the infrastructure, particularly in the areas of water and electricity. Later, the state shifts its focus to schools, health centers and hospitals.

However, the most important stage in reconstruction, which comes later and constitutes the most serious challenge for us, is restoring daily activity especially economic livelihood. This requires a great deal of effort and is affected by internal factors and the external environment - namely the embargo imposed by Western countries on Syria, which has a negative affect and slows the process down. So, reconstruction has already started, but we need more investments from within and outside the country in order to scale it up.

Question 2: And here we ask, Mr. President, what are the most important areas in which

Syria needs the help of friendly countries, including China?

President Assad: China specifically provides assistance in reconstruction particularly in the humanitarian domain. As I mentioned earlier, life's necessities are water and electricity and China is providing support in these areas through humanitarian grants which we apply to the areas most in need.

In the past, we did not engage in discussions with our friends – and at the forefront China, on reconstruction because the security situation did not allow us to initiate this process on a large scale. Now, with the liberation of most areas, we have started discussions with a number of Chinese companies experienced in reconstruction. As I mentioned, the most important stage and the greatest challenge is the full restoration of the economic cycle. We would hope that Chinese companies start looking and studying the Syrian market which is improving quickly and constantly in terms of security.

It is essential that we start discussing investment opportunities, because it is well-known that rebuilding countries destroyed partially or totally by war is very profitable and has high returns-on-investment. The process is not limited to loans or providing aid without any returns, it is a profitable investment in every sense of the word.

We have started talking to a number of Chinese companies on finding ways to evade sanctions and have access to the Syrian market. They have shown an interest because the process is profitable, but investors and investment companies still have concerns about the way sanctions could impact them. We have found certain formulas, which will not be disclosed of course, for them to enter the Syrian market safely and consequently contribute to the reconstruction process in Syria.

I would like to emphasize that this support is not limited to the economy; reconstruction ultimately means contributing to Syria's stability for two reasons. First, in the past two years, millions of Syrians have returned from abroad without finding sufficient job opportunities, which in itself is a factor that can be used by terrorists and outside powers. Second, the reconciliation we have achieved in Syria, was in part with those who worked with the militants or the terrorists at a certain period. They agreed to lay down their weapons and return to their normal lives – this return requires job opportunities. So, the support from China and other friendly countries in Syria's reconstruction, is as important as the military efforts to restoring stability in Syria, and striking and fighting terrorism.

Question 3: So, can we ask about the concrete measures that are being taken by the Syrian government in order to attract investors coming from China and other friendly countries?

President Assad: The first thing an investor needs is security. When we talk about a country coming out of war: we have achieved great milestones in this respect, but we are not completely finished. The first question an investor asks is about security, this is what we are doing on a daily basis – fighting terrorists and liberating areas one by one.

As to the investment environment, there are requirements any investor would need, regardless of whether there is a war or not. In this regard, we are focusing on two things: the urgent, which is improving this investment environment by addressing necessary measures, like transparency, clarity on investors' rights and obligations in the country and the legal or judicial aspects of their investments. With all these issues, we are currently drawing up clear guidelines for investors.

However, the more important and comprehensive step is the investment law. We have achieved significant progress in developing our investment law in-line with similar laws in many other countries around the world, thus ensuring it is based on international investment standards.

This law clearly identifies the guarantees given to investors concerning their investment in Syria: legal guarantees, financial guarantees, exemptions clearly laid out, the tax situation for their investments – and any other aspects which constitute a guarantee to ensure that this investment is completely safe and profitable. We are now in the final stages of this law and it will be passed soon.

Question 4: Well, Mr. President, are there specific measures taken to ensure the existence of a safe investment environment which assure Chinese investors to come and not face any security problems? Chinese investors are very concerned about this.

President Assad: That's right, this is a serious challenge. In fact, there are two challenges. First, is the current lack of sufficient or effective financial channels between Syria and China for the transfer of money. This is a real problem caused mainly by the sanctions. A solution must be found if we want investors to come to Syria; a solution needs the engagement of relevant financial institutions from both countries, which requires discussion at a state level. This is a major obstacle that needs to be overcome.

The second issue is the fear that many Chinese companies still have. Today, there are companies which are willing to send experts to Syria. This is important because many Syrian industries have started to show interest in the Chinese market, for example Syrian factories which buy their equipment from China. Previously, Chinese experts had concerns about coming to Syria; this has recently started to improve, which is a new step.

However, when we talk about Chinese investment with Chinese capital, this needs more assurances; we must exert greater effort in this regard as a Syrian state and we hope the Chinese state with its relevant institutions – like the China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation, to encourage investors to come to Syria or at least to the areas which have become completely safe. In this interview I confirm this and since you are in Syria, you are able to convey the true, unexaggerated picture about the extent of security achieved recently.

Intervention: So, the Syrian government guarantees security to all Chinese companies which might come to Syria, and that there is no problem in terms of safety?

President Assad: Certainly.

Question 5: Mr. President, I would like to ask you about the Belt and Road Initiative. How do you see this initiative in general?

President Assad: From a strategic perspective, it constitutes a worldwide transformation, a transformation in the nature of international relations. If we look at the current situation in the world, we see that it is governed by Western attempts of domination, particularly on the part of the United States. In the past during the Cold War, there was a period of conflict among states. This conflict was based on the degree of dominance of each pole, particularly the Western pole over a group of states, in order to achieve its interests against the other pole.

Before that, World War II and the preceding period of full colonialization; states occupied other nations and wherever they did so, they defined the interests of those peoples under their domination. In most cases there were no mutual interests; those peoples were enslaved by the more powerful states.

Today, we see that there is a superpower – China, trying to strengthen its influence in the world. But what kind of influence? It is not the negative influence we have become accustomed to, but rather an influence in the sense of relying on friends and an influence based on mutual interests. When we in Syria think about being part of the Silk Road and Syria is a small country – by international, geographic, demographic, economic and military standards...

Intervention: But historically, it is on the Silk Road.

President Assad: It is exactly on the Silk Road, but what is more important is that this new approach is derived from history but is suitable for the 21st century; it is an approach built on parity. When we are part of this Road, China treats us as equals and not as a superpower dealing with a small country. There are mutual interests: it is beneficial to China, Syria and all the countries on this Road.

Another aspect, is that it is not limited to China's bilateral relations with these countries but rather it is a relationship among all the countries on this axis. So, it is a relationship of culture and civilization which ultimately leads to greater prosperity and investment, and the improvement of the social, economic and security conditions in these countries. This means more stability in the world, which is contrary to what we have known in our modern and recent history. This is what we see in the Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative): stability and prosperity.

Question 6: Syria, for its part, expressed its desire to take part in the Belt and Road Initiative. Are there any developments in this regard?

President Assad: During the previous period, and especially in the early years of the war due to the instability, it wasn't our priority. Perhaps because it didn't make sense to talk about infrastructure when you are in a state of life or death, not as individuals but as a homeland, as a nation – Syria.

Now that we have overcome this stage and with the increased stability and the improvement of the economic cycle in Syria, we have started this year a serious dialogue with the Chinese government on how Syria can become part of the Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative). At present Syria is not on the route; there are different routes and Syria is not on them. However, part of the initiative includes cultural, educational and scientific domains, and through the direct relationship between us and China, there has been a large number – which has increased in recent years – of scholarships offered to Syria that we are benefitting from. The discussions have recently started concerning infrastructure, which is one of the most important elements and could make Syria a part of the Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative) in the future. We have proposed a number of projects only a few months ago.

Intervention: In specific areas.

President Assad: Of course. In areas related to infrastructure, we have proposed around six projects to the Chinese government in line with the Belt and Road methodology and we are

waiting for the Chinese government to determine which project, or projects, is in line with their thinking. I think when this infrastructure is developed, with time, the Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative) passing through Syria becomes a foregone conclusion, because it is not a road you only draw on a map. Whilst it is true that historically the Silk Road passed through Syria, Iraq and this region, today however, this initiative takes into account the available infrastructure required for these routes. Therefore, by establishing, strengthening, and developing this infrastructure, the Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative) will pass through Syria in the future.

Question 7: Do you think that Syria has now become ready, security-wise, to be part of this initiative?

President Assad: Precisely, because we are ready security-wise, we have started discussions with our Chinese friends. Before that, it wasn't logically or practically possible to initiate such a dialogue.

Question 8: Mr. President, I would like to ask you about the situation in America. The United States holds presidential elections next year. If Trump is not reelected for a new presidential term, would that failure, in your opinion, be useful to Syria or not?

President Assad: In one of my interviews, I referred to Trump as being the best because he is the most transparent. Of course, being the best doesn't mean that he is good; but transparency is a good thing especially that when it comes to Western politics because we have become accustomed to masks which hide real Western intentions regarding the world.

However at the same time, we need to realise that the American political system is not a state system in the sense that we understand. It is a system comprised of lobbies. The rulers of America are the money lobbies, whether in the form of oil, weapons, banks, or others. These lobbies control all parts of American politics.

When Trump tried to be independent, albeit in a very limited degree, the attack against him started. We are now witnessing the impeachment process aimed at bringing the President back into line with the lobbies. All the presidents we have dealt with in Syria, from Nixon in 1974 - when relations with America were restored, up to Trump today are controlled by these lobbies. No matter how much good will any president has, he cannot act outside the policies of these lobbies. Therefore, betting on the change of presidents is misplaced and unrealistic and I don't think that this American policy will change in the next few years. That's why during the election campaign, they say one thing and once they are elected, they do the complete opposite. For those reasons in Syria we never consider which American president comes and which one leaves.

Intervention: In this context, I pose the question: after the American president announced his intention to withdraw American forces from Syria, he suddenly backtracked and said that he will leave American troops in Syria in order to protect oil wells in the area east of the Euphrates. So, he suddenly takes a decision, and then goes back on it.

President Assad: Exactly, what you are saying confirms my point that the lobbies are the ones in charge of the policies. It also confirms that this state is not governed by principles, but rather by the interests of those companies; if they have an interest in occupying the oil wells, stealing and selling them one way or another, then this state and this regime will act in favor of these companies, regardless of international law and regardless of American law.

They violate American laws for the sake of these companies because if they don't make them happy, the president might be impeached.

Question 9: Mr. President, what is the number of the remaining American troops on Syrian territories now?

President Assad: The funny thing in American politics is that they announce the number between thousands and hundreds. When they say thousands: it is to make the the pro-war lobby - particularly the arms companies, happy that they are in a state of war. When they say hundreds: they are addressing the people who oppose the war by saying that they are only "a few hundred." In actual fact, both figures are incorrect for a simple reason; even if these figures were correct, they are based on the number of American soldiers and not the number of individuals fighting with the American army. The American regime relies significantly in its wars on private firms like Blackwater in Iraq and others. So even if they had a few hundred American soldiers in Syria, they still also have thousands - maybe tens of thousands, of civilians working for such companies and fighting in Syria. That's why it is difficult to know the real number, but it is certainly in the thousands.

Question 10: The Americans say that they will protect oil wells in the east of Euphrates area in Syria; but in the end, what are they going to do with the oil produced from those wells?

President Assad: Before the Americans, in the early days Jabhat al-Nusra used these wells; after [ISIS](#) came and drove out al-Nusra - or rather when [ISIS](#) merged with al-Nusra and they all became [ISIS](#), it also stole and sold oil. Where? It used to sell it through Turkey. Now America is the one stealing oil and selling it to Turkey. Turkey is an accomplice, with all these groups, in selling oil; it doesn't have a problem - Turkey is ready. The Turkish regime plays a direct part in selling the oil, previously with al-Nusra, later with [ISIS](#) and today with the Americans.

Question 11: In this situation, what is the impact on Syrian oil returns?

President Assad: At a certain point at the beginning of the war, oil returns dropped to almost zero. Today - after restoring a small number of wells during the past two years - we have a little amount of oil. However, there is still limited positive impact on the Syrian economy from oil because most of the wells are either under the control of terrorist groups or groups acting outside the law and under American command. So, the situation with the oil has not changed much.

Question 12: Yes. So, how is the Syrian government going to face the question of American presence in the oil fields area east of the Euphrates?

President Assad: First, the Americans rely on terrorists. The terrorists must be attacked, this is a priority for us in Syria. Striking the terrorists weakens the American presence one way or another. At a later stage: there are Syrian groups acting under American command and these groups must be persuaded, one way or another and particularly through dialogue, that it is in all our interests in Syria that they embrace the homeland and join the Syrian state's efforts to liberate all its territories. At that point, it's only natural that there will be no prospect for an American presence. However, if they remained, they have their experience in Iraq to consider; there will be a popular resistance and they will pay the price. Ultimately, the Americans will leave.

Question 13: Mr. President, we have witnessed recently popular protests and riots in some neighboring countries, including Iraq, Lebanon, and even Iran. In fact, these countries are considered, to a certain extent, Syria's allies. How do you view what happened and is happening in these countries?

President Assad: Of course, neighboring countries have a direct impact on us because there are direct family and economic relations, as well as other types of relations that exist between any two neighboring countries. At the same time, the Middle East as a whole is one area; the social fabric is similar, beliefs are similar and interests are intertwined even when these countries are not direct neighbors.

If we assume that the movements taking place aim to address the problems faced by the population and that they would lead to improving economic, political and other conditions in these countries, then I can say that the impact will be positive.

However, if we think logically, would the Western countries and in particular the United States, leave these countries to continue spontaneously?! They would definitely interfere and would certainly exploit every movement in order to create chaos, because American policy - at least since 2000 and since the Iraq war - is to create chaos. This is what they called 'constructive chaos;' that is how George Bush and Condoleezza Rice referred to it. This 'constructive chaos' which they are looking for, is a type of chaos that achieves their interests. That's why when this chaos takes place in our region, or in any other region, it will have a negative impact on us. Chaos is contagious, it's like a disease, it spreads; so, we can only hope that these events remain in the internal, spontaneous, popular framework.

Question 14: Would it be possible to say that one should look for an American role wherever there is chaos?

President Assad: This is self-evident and has become well-known throughout the world. What is the difference between the policies of superpowers: America, and those who stand with it - like France and Britain, believe or think - which we see as wrong but they see as right - that the interests of these countries or this axis, lies in creating chaos; whereas Russia, China and most other countries believe that stability and international law are in the best interest of the world and its states, big or small.

Journalist: Mr. President, thank you very much for availing us this opportunity and we wish you continued success and progress.

President Assad: Thank you and I also thank Phoenix Television for this interview.

Journalist: Thank you very much.

President Assad: You are welcome.

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