

# Bashar al-Assad Interview: Israel Supports Al Qaeda Terrorists

By [Global Research News](#)

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Clarín (Argentina) and SANA

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

Bashar al-Assad: "I don't give up. People say who stays and who should go, not U.S."

*Bashar al-Assad interview with Argentine newspaper Clarín: "I don't give up. People say who stays and who should go, not U.S."*

*President al-Assad: Basis for Any Political Solution for Crisis in Syria is What the Syrian People Want*

May 18, 2013 - DAMASCUS

*President Bashar al-Assad affirmed that the basis for any political solution for the crisis in Syria is what the Syrian people want, which is decided through ballots, saying that Syria welcomes the Russian-US rapprochement, voicing Syria's support for any suggestion which halts violence and leads to a political solution and its readiness to hold dialogue with any Syrian side which didn't deal with Israel secretly or publically and which rejects terrorism.*

*In an interview with Argentina's Clarín newspaper and Telam news agency, President al-Assad said that Israel supports terrorists, directs them and gives them the general plan of their movements according to its interests which intersect with those of several foreign sides including Qatar and Turkey which don't want a political solution in Syria and which support terrorism.*

Following is the full text of the interview:~

Q1:

What has made the Syrian Crisis so complex and protracted?

Firstly, numerous factors have influenced the Syrian crisis both internally and externally, the most significant of which is foreign interference. Secondly, the calculations of confrontational states that intervened in Syria have now proven incorrect. These states perceived their plan would succeed within weeks or months; this has not materialized. What has transpired is that the Syrian people have resisted, and continue to resist and reject all forms of external intervention. For us, it is a matter of safeguarding Syria.~

Q2:

What is the total number of fallen victims in the crisis so far? Some sources report that the numbers exceed 70.000 people.

The death of any Syrian is a tragic loss, regardless of the numbers; but one has to examine the credibility of these sources. We cannot ignore the fact that many of those that have died were foreigners who came to Syria to kill Syrians. There are also many missing who have been accounted for as dead without real authenticity. This affects the accuracy of the quoted numbers of the death toll. How many are Syrians? How many are foreigners? How many are missing? At present, there is no precise comprehensive number to quote. These numbers are constantly changing. Terrorists kill people and often put them in mass graves. We can only discover and account for those losses after the Syrian army goes into these areas.

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Q3:

On this note, has excessive force been used by the government throughout the conflict?

Here it is imperative to determine the meaning of “excessive force” in order to determine whether it has been used or not. Without a clear criterion to this notion, it is inconceivable to discuss the concept.

The response of the state generally amounts to the level of terrorism perpetrated against it. With more sophisticated levels of terrorism, our response to those threats intensifies.

At the beginning of the crisis, acts of terror were carried out by local groups using local armaments. With time, these armed groups were able to source more sophisticated and destructive weaponry and fighters, which allowed them to carry out terrorist acts on a much wider scale. This warranted a similar response from the Syrian army and security forces. The response in each scenario differs according to the form or methods of terror adopted by the terrorists and in a way to repel an area from terrorist insurgents whilst protecting civilian lives.

Therefore, the factors that determine our level of force relate to the types of weapons and terrorism techniques we are dealing with as well as our ultimate goal of protecting the lives of civilians and the country as a whole.

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Q4:

At the start of the crisis, there were some foreigner fighters. It has been two years into the crisis now; do you believe that dialogue could have prevented foreign intervention and the involvement of the crisis into its current shape?

It was seemingly apparent at the beginning that demands were for reforms. It was utilized to appear as if the crisis was a matter of political reform. Indeed, we pursued a policy of wide scale reforms from changing the constitution to many of the legislations and laws, including lifting the state of emergency law, and embarking on a national dialogue with all political opposition groups. It was striking that with every step we took in the reform process, the level of terrorism escalated.

This ultimately begs the question: what is the relationship between demanding reforms and adopting terrorism? Terrorism can never be the instrument to achieve reforms. What interest does an internationally listed terrorist from Chechnya or Afghanistan have with the internal political reform process in Syria? How is the legitimate demand for reform linked with terrorist activities adopted by radicalized foreign fighters? The same context applies to those external fighters from Iraq, Lebanon and others. Recent credible reports show that there are approximately 29 nationalities of foreign fighters engaged in terrorism activities within Syria's borders.

We were staunchly committed to political reforms and have implemented them, and we have presented a broad political initiative based on a national dialogue. The essence of any political solution is the aspirations of the Syrian people, decided by the ballot boxes. States do not negotiate with terrorists. However dialogue with the political opposition has been a fundamental policy of ours, which we remain deeply committed to.

Terrorism struck in countries from the United States to Europe. Have these states ever negotiated with terrorists? Dialogue is with legitimate political entities and a conventional opposition, not with terrorist groups who maintain a code of killing, beheading and administering violence including the use of poisonous gas, which amounts to chemical weapons.

Q5:

Mr. President, would these reforms bring about genuine democratic representation of the Syrian people including freedom of press and expression?

You may be aware that there is a new media law already established amongst the recent reforms adopted. We aimed at an ultimately more comprehensive process; we envisioned a national dialogue for all political entities, which would then act as a pre-requisite for a unified national charter and a new constitution with a wider range of freedoms, including political and media freedom. This new constitution would then be put to a referendum.

Freedom of press and political freedom are two inextricably intertwined concepts, which reinforce and supplement each other, the pursuit of one is impotent without the other, they must both work in tandem with each other.

Q6:

Your Excellency always emphasize that the key to resolving the crisis is dialogue, which is most agreeable. How do you see the conference proposed at the end of this month in light of the initial agreement between the USA and Russia? How do you evaluate this process especially with the interference of France and UK?

We reiterate our support for all steps that would entail stopping the violence in Syria and lead to a political solution. However, the cessation of violence is paramount to reaching a political settlement.

We welcome the Russian-American rapprochement and support its potentiality of being a platform to facilitate the resolution of the Syrian crisis. We do remain skeptical of the genuine intentions of certain western administrations towards seeking a realistic political solution in Syria. This caution is based on their continued support of terrorist groups in Syria. We are dedicated to pursuing a political solution, yet there are powers who are pressing for

the failure of such a solution. This is a two-way process; it needs commitment from all sides.

Q7:

Are these doubts related to opposition entities or to certain countries and major international players that are hindering a political solution in Syria?

Essentially, some foreign-based opposition elements that you mentioned are far from autonomous independent decision makers, their policies are crafted by the countries that give them leverage. These opposition segments survive on the aid given to them by their patron states, in essence manipulated by the nations that provide their flow of finance. They live under the auspice and control of their intelligence agencies and thus submit to what is imposed upon them. Therefore their decisions are not self-governing; most significantly, they lack a popular base in Syria. If they believed that they had public support, they would have functioned politically from within Syria's borders, not extrinsically from abroad. We do currently have internal political opposition parties based from within, enjoying varying levels of popular intrinsic support. The Syrian government has not intimidated or been hostile to these internal political entities.

Subsequently, the resonant question here is: what justifies the presence of parts of the opposition abroad, except for the notion that they are led by external agendas? In short, are we skeptical of both these opposition groups and the countries supporting them, they are very closely linked. Importantly, these are not doubts; it is a well-documented fact that they have until last week clearly and repeatedly rejected political dialogue.

Q8:

How can this dialogue be achieved when the opposition factions are fragmented? When talking about dialogue, who is the dialogue to be held with?

We have always advocated and remain vehemently committed to a comprehensive national dialogue to include all who have a genuine desire to participate, with no exclusions. We take into consideration the premise that they are dedicated towards a better Syria within the limits of its sovereignty and right to self-determination. This is subject to the fact that they have not engaged with Israel either acquiescently or in secret.

This process of course does not include terrorists. There is no state that would ever negotiate with terrorists. However, we welcome those who lay down their weapons and engage in constructive political dialogue. There are empirical examples of many who took up arms, subsequently laid down their weapons and moved into political participation and are engaging with the Syrian state. They do have legitimate demands and suggestions; the Syrian government is openly addressing them.

We reinforce the notion that a peaceful political solution would not be feasible when terrorism is supported. There is fundamental contradiction in supporting terrorism whilst claiming to support the success of a political conference at the same time. Certain countries are aiding terrorism in Syria through financing and the streaming of arms. Our assumption is that these countries would not cease this policy as their main goal is to undermine and thus weaken the Syrian state. A political resolution in Syria would help the country to develop and prosper, contrary to what these particular countries are attempting to achieve.

The Syrian people would form a vision towards the future with all the political entities drawn

towards the congress, and potentially reach palpable comprehensive agreements on matters stretching from the constitution, to new laws and legislations. Also spanning issues such as discussing the desired shape of the future political structure in Syria, evoking debates regarding the most suitable system, be it parliamentarian or presidential. Such a process would correctly shape the future of Syria.

Terrorism is a separate concern. Even when we succeed in reaching a Syrian-led political agreement, certain countries such as Qatar, Turkey and others will continue to work to fuel violence and terrorism in Syria. Therefore, our main precedence from an international conference is an immediate cessation of finance and weapons that are regularly streamed into Syria, placing emphasis on preventing the terrorists and fighters from being flooded into Syria principally through Turkey, with financial support primarily from Qatar and also from other Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia.

When major international powers act ardently to stop the financing, training and streaming of terrorist, fighting terrorism in Syria becomes considerably simpler and then a real political solution would generate genuine results. New constitution and new laws, while the Syrian people are being victims of indefensible terrorism would not produce any real realistic solution.

Q9:

So would you talk to foreign -based entities?

We would engage in dialogue with all political entities, internal or external with no set pre-conditions. This also includes the armed groups who lay down their weapons and renounce terrorism. Guns and dialogue are clearly incompatible.

As a matter of fact, there are certain groups and entities, which are subject to legal prosecution; up until this point we have not initiated formal legal proceedings against them in any capacity, in order to facilitate the proposed dialogue. This will culminate with the Syrian people eventually judging their agendas; they themselves will decide who is credible and who is fraudulent. We have not administered a state-imposed recipe for the solution; this in its entirety has been left for the Syrian people to decide.

Q 10:

What role is Israel playing in the Syrian crisis, especially after the Israeli air strikes on sites inside Syria?

Israel directly supports the terrorist movements in two ways. Firstly, through logistical means manifested by them publicly providing medical aid and hospital facilities to the injured terrorist fighters in the Golan Heights. Secondly, they provide them with directions and navigational support, regarding how to mount their attacks and which sites to target. For instance they attacked Radar sites, which are strictly related to the air defense systems that would detect and intercept any foreign air force activity. They have mobilized them to attack these air defense systems since they are an important deterrent in any military confrontation between Syria and Israel.

Therefore the Israeli support for the terrorists is twofold, logistical assistance and navigational help to direct the terrorist movements and operations on the ground.

~Q11:

You condemn the presence of foreign fighters in Syria. Some would argue that fighters from Hezbollah and Iran are fighting alongside the Syrian army. What do you say on that?

This narrative was crafted in the West when we documented the presence of foreign jihadists fighting in Syria. They created this notion that Hezbollah and Iran are also fighting in Syria as a counterweight.

Syria can rely on a population of 23 million; it does not require manpower sustenance from any country. We have at our disposal an army, security forces and the Syrian people to defend our country. Therefore, we have no necessity for any other group to fight on our behalf regardless of whether they are from Iran or Hezbollah. Our relations with Iran and Hezbollah are well known and span decades. It is well known that we exchange expertise on many fronts.

Regarding the claims that there are fighters from these entities in Syria, this would be a matter that is practically impossible to hide. First and foremost, the Syrian people would have identified them. So where could they possibly be? If there is ever a need or a requirement, we will be transparent and announce it formally. We are certainly not utilizing any external fighters in Syria from any Arab or foreign nationality. Personnel from Iran and Hezbollah have existed in Syria for years before the crisis, under agreements they do come and go into Syria formally.

Q 12:

If no progress is made on dialogue, do you anticipate that the armed opposition would lay down their weapons and reach an agreement? Would your government take political steps to resolve the crisis; would Your Excellency relinquish power?

The Syrian people will decide whether I remain in office or not. As a president, it is not for me to decide whether I stay or go, this is the decision of the electorate. It is impossible to lead when you are not desired by the public; this is essentially common sense and doesn't need much debate. Through the constitution and the presidential elections in 2014, the people will decide.

As for the armed groups you cited, they are not one single autonomous group. We are dealing with hundreds of small fractured militias. One of the fundamental reasons for Kofi Annan's resignation was that he did not know whom to negotiate with from the other side.

From our perspective, there is one state with one president and one prime-minister and a clear coherent political structure. As for the terrorist entities, they are in groups and militias with a constellation that includes convicted criminals, drug smugglers, and fundamentalist movements. Each anarchical movement has its local leader. Therefore we are talking about thousands of differentiating personalities. The logical question is: who can unite these? One cannot conceivably account for and build a road map with these ambiguous groups who have no political agendas. As noted previously, not all of these groups are extremists. Some of them are thieves, some are building material wealth out of the crisis and others are outlaws or opportunists with a direct interest in prolonging the crisis. Building a tangible political process with these groups is a complex task. If they had a conventional structure, it would have been more feasible to envisage a way of doing so.

This reality means we deal with each case individually and according to its circumstances. Once an armed individual or group lay down their arms, we automatically engage with them and move towards dialogue. We recognize that this is not a conclusive comprehensive dialogue; however, we do not believe in a policy of “all or nothing”. We are incrementally building on this strategy, which has indeed helped to attenuate the crisis in several parts in Syria.

Q13:

So, Mr President, you continue to reject stepping down?

As I previously specified, remaining or leaving my position is not my individual choice. As President, I was elected by the Syrian people and therefore only the Syrian people have the authority to decide on this matter, through dialogue or the forthcoming presidential elections as I mentioned earlier. But to ascertain that the Syrian President must step down because the United States wants him to or because terrorists and certain countries desire so is totally unacceptable. This matter solely relates to the electorate’s decision through ballot boxes.

Q 14:

The United States of America gave indications through President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry’s statements that it does not want to intervene in Syria. However Kerry stated that any dialogue should include the possibility of you leaving power. If you reach this dialogue on an international level, could this be of the cards that you may use to reach a solution to the crisis?

I do not know if Mr. Kerry or others like him have a mandate from the Syrian people to speak on their behalf as to who stays and who leaves. We clearly stated from the beginning of the crisis that any decision relating to internal reform or any other political activity is a Syrian internal domestic decision and the United states or any other country for that matter have no say in the matter. To be even more concise and clear, we are an independent state, we are a people who respect ourselves and our right to self-determination. We do not accept for anyone to dictate to us how to act, whether it is the United States or any other country. Therefore this possibility is to be solely determined by the Syrian people; put simply one stands for office at election time, he either wins or he loses. This is the mechanism in which a president may leave power, not that of entering a conference with pre-dictated conditions, which the people have not chosen.

The country now faces a crisis; when a ship is in the eye of the storm, the Captain does not jump. On the contrary, his duty is to face the storm and navigate the ship to safe waters. Any abandonment of my duties now is an attempt to escape from responsibility and I’m not the type of person who runs away from his responsibilities.

Q 15:

In addition to the early pre-condition of you stepping down particularly by France and Britain, they have accused your government of using chemical weapons. Mr. Kerry stated yesterday that there was “strong evidence” that in March 2013 the Syrian army used Sarin Gas in Aleppo. What would you say on that? Do you think that the western emphasis on this issue is a prelude to military intervention in Syria? Are you worried about such scenario

transpiring?

The statements made on Syria by Western countries, whether it is regarding chemical weapons or the President stepping down, vary on almost a daily basis. One day they infer that they have evidence on the use of chemical weapons and the following day they conclude that there is no such evidence, the subsequent day they say there is evidence again. We shall wait to see if they settle on one narrative.

But we shouldn't be wasting time with empty rhetoric, what is more important is reality. Chemical weapons are weapons of mass destruction; the accusation is that we have used them in populated areas. If, for instance, a nuclear weapon is deployed in a city or populated district, is it plausible that it merely kills ten or twenty people? The use of chemical weapons in populated areas would result in the death of thousands or tens of thousands within minutes. Can this really be concealed? We need to look closer, especially at the timing. These allegations appeared after terrorist groups mounted chemical attacks in Aleppo, which we have substantiated with tangible evidence - we have the missile that was used and its chemical materials. We sent an official letter to the United Nations Security Council requesting a formal investigation into the incident. This no doubt left certain countries such as the United States, France and Britain in a difficult quandary. Soon afterwards, they began to allege that Syria had used chemical weapons against the terrorists. To avoid the investigations, they instead requested to send inspectors with unconditional and unfettered access to different locations in Syria, away from the area where the actual incident occurred. In fact, a member of the UN investigators, Carla Del Ponte, stated last week that there was evidence that the terrorists in Syria had used nerve agents.

Using these allegations as a clear pretext for military intervention in Syria is a possible scenario, as it did occur in Iraq when Colin Powell stood in the Security Council and presented what we now know to be false evidence of Iraqi WMD's; but where were the WMD's? It is common knowledge that western administrations lie continuously and manufacture stories as a pretext for war.

Any war against Syria will not be a picnic, the situation here is very different. Whilst it is quite plausible that they may contemplate the idea of war on Syria, we have no evidence that this is anything more than theory. We do however always keep this in mind.

Q16:

At present, are you concerned about military action against Syria? Perhaps not in the form of conventional invasion like in Iraq, but a direct military strike?

This is precisely what Israel acted upon last week. It is always a standing possibility and occurs from time to time, especially when we continue to make progress across the country against the terrorist groups and shift the balance of power on the ground.

The countries cited earlier delegated Israel to commit its aggression in order to improve the morale of the terrorist groups. These nations serve to prolong the violence and bloodshed in Syria in order to significantly weaken the Syrian state. Therefore military action against us is not an improbable scenario; it may transpire at any time, even on a limited-scale.

Q17:



You now say that the situation in Syria is under control, however we hear many echoes of guns and mortars, how has the crisis developed militarily in recent days especially after the armed groups have closed in on Damascus?

The term control is often used when waging a war against a foreign army on your own territory; where we can state that we dominate this region or control another. The situation in Syria differs completely; we are dealing with terrorists who have infiltrated specific areas. They could be occupying a certain building in an area, this does not mean they have full control over that particular area. Since they are not a typical army, they have the ability to hide and escape from one place to another relatively quickly. As for the Syrian Army, there has not been any instance where they have planned to enter a particular location to control the area and have not been able to do so. This is where we can use the term control.

There are areas where terrorists are able to maneuver more easily, especially since it is only normal that no army in the world that can present in every corner of any given country. Our military activities are aimed at striking terrorism, not on freeing land. We have achieved significant results in recent weeks and as such a large portion of terrorists have left Syria, whilst others have surrendered to the state. We are not looking to control a particular region or another. We are fighting a war against terrorism, the battle is long and we are making good progress.

Q 18:

Mr President, to what extent do you think that Obama's foreign policy is considerably different to previous American leaders?

The United States is broadly governed by certain institutions and particular lobbies. Any new leader can contribute and leave their mark, however, they cannot draw their own autonomous policies independently from those existing institutions and lobbies. So changes in American administrations create only subtle differences in foreign policy, because the governing institutions and lobbies do not change. This makes it difficult to measure the impact of any particular President or Foreign Minister.

Most importantly to us in Syria, is that foreign policy in the United States is still profoundly biased towards Israel against the legitimate rights of the Arab people, particularly Palestinians. In the last 20 years, the United States has not taken any serious or genuine steps to push for a peace process. They invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, and are still adopting the same policies. From a humanitarian perspective, they still administer and run the prison at Guantanamo. So what has changed? The rhetoric? That has no real value, what is important is action on the ground. So as I said the American administrations on this topic are very similar.

Q 19:

George W Bush commanded a better economy and rushed into war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Obama repeated it in Libya but it seems he has no real desire to intervene in Syria. Do you think this reflects a shift in American policy? Do you think this is due to the change in the world order? When I met you 7 years ago, China was not as powerful as it is currently. In light of this, do you think that American forces would invade Syria?

This question can be addressed from two viewpoints. There is a view within the United

States that the current administration is not keen on wars - we have to ask ourselves why? Is it because of the economic situation, the changes in the global power structure, their failure in Afghanistan, Iraq and others? Or is it genuinely due to a matter of principles? I doubt that this change is about principles. There are changing circumstances that prevent the United States from engaging in new military adventures, especially since these have proven to be costly and have failed to achieve any benefit for them politically. However, Americans are better equipped to determine this than anybody looking in from the outside.

However, from another perspective which we see very clearly and has a direct affect on us, is their continued policy of supporting terrorism logistically and politically in our country, with so-called "non-lethal" aid. Let me ask you, were the events of 9/11 perpetrated by lethal aid? No, quite the contrary, which means you do not necessarily need to support terrorism with weapons. By simply providing financial, logistical and technological support, you make the terrorists ability to kill more lethal. Therefore, it seems as though American policy has shifted away from direct military invasion to more unconventional warfare.

Another more significant question we need to ask ourselves is whether current US foreign policy fostering international stability? Clearly not. Neither the United States nor Western governments are doing anything for international stability. Look at what is happening in North Korea, Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and many other Arab countries, there is no stability; this is what we should be focusing on. War is only a tool, we are talking about principles not tools. If America has shifted away from direct military invasion, it does not mean they have changed their principles. They have changed their tools - yes, but their principles - I doubt it.

Q 20:

When you say war is a means, do you infer that it is a way for the West to impose a Wahhabi or extremist government in Syria? Is it to control Syria's new gas and oil resources, or a mix of both? Do you think that America works with Qatar and Saudi Arabia so an extremist government can take power in Syria?

The primary aim of the West is to ensure that they have "loyal" governments at their disposal, similar to those administrations that existed previously in Latin America, which facilitate the exploitation and consumption of a country's national resources.

As to the West's desire to install an extremist government, there are two distinct perspectives. The first, is that some in the West genuinely fear an extremist government and hence are pushing towards a non-extremist government that is however still 'loyal' to their agenda. The second perspective is that others do not have a problem with an extremist government, which they can 'use now and fight later on'. This policy is ultimately short-sighted. The events in Afghanistan and subsequently New York were the result of these ideas and policies implemented by the United States. They supported the Taliban at varying times and, on September 11, they paid a hefty price. Previously they entered Afghanistan using the prerogative that they are fighting terrorism, and today terrorism and extremism is much more prevalent than it was 10 years ago. In essence they invaded Afghanistan and implicitly made terrorism stronger by doing so. Whilst it was confined to Afghanistan before, today it has developed and has become more widespread in numerous parts of the world. The West works to impose puppet governments loyal to them which ardently implement their policies in whatever form that may be.

What is more dangerous however, is that the Wahhabi states in the region are looking to spread extremist ideologies to the broader public and not just at a government level. In Syria our notion of Islam is very moderate, we do not have any extremist Wahhabi orientations or Wahhabi schools of thought. We reject and resist these extremist ideologies that they are trying to instill into Syrian society. We do this by fighting it politically and through the teaching of proper religion, of the moderate Islam that is Syria is well known for.

As for the gas, this issue has never been discussed with us. However, we had planned and announced major railway transportation projects for the region, other projects linking the five seas, as well as the transfer of oil and gas, north and south, east and west. These would enhance the development process of the region and prosper the economies of all of its countries.

A country like Syria is not by any means a satellite state to the West. Syria is an independent state working for the interests of its people, rather than making the Syrian people work for the interests of the West. It is only normal that they would not want us to play a role, preferring instead a puppet government serving their interests and creating projects that would benefit their peoples and economies. Syria is strategically placed not just for oil and gas projects, but also to shift the balance of power between the major players.

Q 21:

Will the forthcoming 2014 presidential elections be internationally monitored? Will the international media be given free access?

Even as a president, international monitoring is not my own decision. This is subject to the national dialogue process which we are preparing for. At present we are consulting with the diverse internal political powers in Syria to initiate this national dialogue. This would then design the roadmap for the elections.

Certain segments of Syrian society reject the idea of external monitoring and believe that it undermines our national sovereignty. These groups are skeptical of western intentions in Syria and refuse any input from foreign parties on how to “rightly” conduct their own internal affairs. Differing segments feel that the topic of monitoring very much depends on the actual countries involved. If monitoring is to happen, they ask whether it shall be conducted by historically friendly countries – Russia or China for example.

I reiterate, this is not my own decision. This is exclusively a decision to be taken by the Syrian people through a comprehensive national dialogue process encapsulating all Syrian political entities.

Q 22:

With regards to the upcoming presidential elections in Iran, do you think there will be any change overall in Iranian policy?

Of course Iran is a vital country in the region. It is a large country with a key and integral political role. Events in Iran will inevitably have a positive or negative bearing on neighboring states and could affect the stability of the region. From this perspective, Iran is highly significant to Syria. From another perspective, the durable alliance between Iran and Syria has stretched for over three decades. As a friendly state, we closely observe their

internal changes, which, one way or another, will affect Syria's role in the region.

Similar to any other state in the Middle East, Iran has a constantly evolving internal political dynamic and it periodically undergoes political changes. The upcoming elections will reflect the changes in Iranian society, and their increasing weight and political clout in the region.

Iran today is very different from ten years ago. Today, it is one of the most essential and powerful states in the region. This will unquestionably be echoed in the elections. Most certainly, a new Iranian president would not serve the aspirations of the United States by turning the Republic of Iran into an American puppet state; they should not hedge their bets on this. The elections will reflect the changes in Iran internally and not the change that western administrations seek unscrupulously in Iran.

Q 23:

When I interviewed Your Excellency in Buenos Aires, you condemned the Holocaust and denounced any form of genocide. This is different to the Iranian perception. What is the significance of this difference?

The fundamentally important question here is: how can we discuss the Holocaust whilst overlooking the mass killings that have been perpetrated for years upon the Palestinians, or the million and half Iraqis killed by the Americans or the millions of North Koreans killed in the 1950's during the war?

Therefore, this advocates a notion denoting the utilization of the Holocaust as a specifically politicized topic, rather than a pure unadulterated documentation of history. As to its actuality, well I am not a historian to be able to determine accurately fact from fiction. Historical events are determined by those who document these events and can easily be changed or manipulated according to agendas and viewpoints. If you were to ask two Syrian historians about the history of the country, you would most likely get two differing accounts. If the Holocaust is purely a historical issue, why are countless examples of historically well renowned genocides committed against Arab and non-Arab nations totally disregarded?

~Q 24:

Mr. President, during the interview I conducted with you in Buenos Aires, you discussed the significance of Syria to the region, particularly to Iraq where you received millions of Iraqi refugees. Now the situation is different, there are many Syrian refugees abroad. How do you see this crisis as a concern to your security and the security of your family? Are you concerned for their lives or not?

My concern is for my country, for Syria. I am a part of this country and a president cannot feel safe or comfortable when his country is in a crisis. I strongly believe that when Syria is well, then every family will be safe including my own.

Syria cannot be well when there is such a difficult humanitarian crisis with numerous refugees displaced externally and an even higher amount internally. How can I work to resolve this humanitarian crisis other than by being a part of this society?

National interests and national security should always take precedent over your own personal security. By adopting this attitude you no longer fear for yourself and your primary concern becomes the safety of the Syrian people

Q 25:

What would be your primary or most recent self-critique, Mr. President?

Self-critique should be a continuous process. However if we are talking about evaluating a particular period of time or incident, then it is only normal to wait until the event or period has passed. Evaluating the performance and decisions made during this crisis can only be objectively done when we have all the information available and a long term view in mind. Only then can we determine right from wrong. What we are doing at the moment is learning from day to day experiences to ensure that our effectiveness on the ground has more impact.

On the other hand, I believe that what is more important than your own evaluation of yourself is the public's view and opinion on the matter. They ultimately have the concluding say on whether you were right or wrong.

Q 26:

In Latin America, there are approximately 15 million descendants of Syrian origin. They are genuinely concerned over the unfolding events in Syria, and the information they receive is relatively partial. Here I have two questions: what would you like to say to them regarding these concerns? Secondly, when the crisis is over, how will history judge you?

The future will essentially determine your place in history. In a position of responsibility, as is normal in human nature, one can be right or wrong. What is important though is that your decisions were understood to be taken based on national interests. In that way people may agree or disagree with your actions, but they will understand and accept that you were working in the best interests of your country. History will then remember that you were working for your country's interest and not your own.

As for the large expatriate community in Argentina and Latin America, we have always viewed it as a cultural bridge between two distant regions. Because of this great expatriate community, the peoples in Latin America have a better understanding of the situation in our region than those societies in countries closer to the Middle East and the Arab World.

In the current situation and the changes that are taking place on the ground in Syria and Middle East as a whole, these communities now more than ever have a vital and integral role to play. They have an excellent in-depth understanding of the nature of our societies, they are well aware of colonial policies and intentions towards our region. As such, they are able to convey and reflect an accurate account of events in Syria to people in Latin America, especially since your region underwent similar historical changes in previous decades. The countries in your region were transformed from being satellites commanded by the United States into independent and progressive nations. However, an important difference between the two experiences is that your revolutions served your national interests, however our revolutions are fundamentally externally administered, be it their imported ideologies, resources or even through foreign fighters. It is crucial that this expatriate community shares its insights and understanding of the region in a way that helps people in Latin America understand the situation as it is in reality.

Q27:

Mr. President, last question. There are two journalists who are missing in Syria. The first of

Italian nationality, disappeared last March, and the latter was reported missing after he entered Syria six months ago. Do you have any information about them? I would also like to ask you about the two kidnapped Syrian bishops?

There have been certain cases where journalists have illegally entered Syria without the knowledge of the Syrian government. They entered into areas that have a known presence of terrorists and according to their media organizations have gone missing. We continue to search for them through our on-going military operations, and on occasions our forces have been successful in releasing journalists who were kidnapped in areas infiltrated by terrorists. Whenever there is information regarding journalists who have entered Syria illegally, we directly communicate with the concerned country. At present we have no information about the two journalists you mentioned.

As for the two bishops, we have preliminary information that they are near the Turkish-Syrian border. We are closely following this issue and liaising with the Orthodox Patriarchate in Syria to free them from the terrorists groups who abducted them.

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