

Bashar Al Assad Interview: ‘Syria faces not a Civil War, but Terrorism by Proxies’

"The West creates scapegoats as enemies – from communism, to Islam, to Saddam Hussein"

By [RT](#)

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Assad: Erdogan thinks he’s Caliph, new sultan of the Ottoman

In an exclusive interview with RT, President Bashar Assad said that the conflict in Syria is not a civil war, but proxy terrorism by Syrians and foreign fighters. He also accused the Turkish PM of eyeing Syria with imperial ambitions.

Assad told RT that the West creates scapegoats as enemies – from communism, to Islam, to Saddam Hussein. He accused Western countries of aiming to turn him into their next enemy.

While mainstream media outlets generally report on the crisis as a battle between Assad and Syrian opposition groups, the president claims that his country has been infiltrated by numerous terrorist proxy groups fighting on behalf of other powers.

In the event of a foreign invasion of Syria, Assad warned, the fallout would be too dire for the world to bear.

‘My enemy is terrorism and instability in Syria’

RT: President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, thank very much for talking to us today.

Bashar Assad: You are most welcome in Damascus.

RT: There are many people who were convinced a year ago that you would not make it this far. Here again you are sitting in a newly renovated presidential palace and recording this interview. Who exactly is your enemy at this point?

BA: My enemy is terrorism and instability in Syria. This is our enemy in Syria. It is not about the people, it is not about persons. The whole issue is not about me staying or leaving. It is about the country being safe or not. So, this is the enemy we have been fighting as Syria.

RT: I have been here for the last two days and I had the chance to talk to a couple of people in Damascus. Some of them say that whether you stay or go at this point does not really matter anymore. What do you say about this?

BA: I think for the president to stay or leave is a popular issue. It is related to the opinion of some people and the only way can be done through the ballot boxes. So, it is not about

what we hear. It is about what we can get through that box and that box will tell any president to stay or leave very simply.

RT: I think what they meant was that at this point you are not the target anymore; Syria is the target.

BA: I was not the target; I was not the problem anyway. The West creates enemies; in the past it was the communism then it became Islam, and then it became Saddam Hussein for a different reason. Now, they want to create a new enemy represented by Bashar. That's why they say that the problem is the president so he has to leave. That is why we have to focus of the real problem, not to waste our time listening to what they say.

'The fight now is not the president's fight - it is Syrians' fight to defend their country'



RT: Do you personally still believe that you are the only man who can hold Syria together and the only man who can put an end to what the world calls a 'civil war'?

BA: We have to look at it from two aspects. The first aspect is the constitution and I have my authority under the constitution. According to this authority and the constitution, I have to be able to solve the problem. But if we mean it that you do not have any other Syrian who can be a president, no, any Syrian could be a president. We have many Syrians who are eligible to be in that position. You cannot always link the whole country only to one person.

RT: But you are fighting for your country. Do you believe that you are the man who can put

an end to the conflict and restore peace?

BA: I have to be the man who can do that and I hope so, but it is not about the power of the President; it is about the whole society. We have to be precise about this. The president cannot do anything without the institutions and without the support of the people. So, the fight now is not a President's fight; it is Syrians' fight. Every Syrian is involved in defending his country now.

RT: It is and a lot of civilians are dying as well in the fighting. So, if you were to win this war, how would you reconcile with your people after everything that has happened?

BA: Let's be precise once again. The problem is not between me and the people; I do not have a problem with the people because the United States is against me and the West is against me and many other Arab countries, including Turkey which is not Arab of course, are against me. If the Syrian people are against me, how can I be here?!

RT: They are not against you?

BA: If the whole world, or let us say a big part of the world, including your people, are against you, are you a superman?! You are just a human being. So, this is not logical. It is not about reconciling with the people and it is not about reconciliation between the Syrians and the Syrians; we do not have a civil war. It is about terrorism and the support coming from abroad to terrorists to destabilize Syria. This is our war.

RT: Do you still not believe it is a civil war because I know there are a lot who think that there are terrorist acts which everyone believes take place in Syria, and there are also a lot of sectarian-based conflicts. For example we all heard about the mother who has two sons; one son is fighting for the government forces and the other son is fighting for the rebel forces, how this is not a civil war?

BA: You have divisions, but division does not mean civil war. It is completely different. Civil wars should be based on ethnic problems or sectarian problems. Sometimes you may have ethnic or sectarian tensions but this do not make them problem. So, if you have division in the same family or in a bigger tribe or whatever or in the same city, it does not mean a civil war. This is completely different and that is normal. We should expect that.

RT: When I asked about reconciling with your people, this is what I meant: I heard you say on many different occasions that the only thing you care about is what the Syrian people think of you and what Syrian people feel towards you and whether you should be a president or not. Are you not afraid that there has been so much damage done for whatever reason that at the end of the day Syrians won't care about the truth; they will just blame you for the carnage that they have suffered?

BA: This is a hypothetical question because what the people think is the right thing, and regarding what they think, we have to ask them. But I don't have this information right now. So, I am not afraid about what some people think; I am afraid about my country. We have to be focused on that.

RT: For years there have been so many stories about almighty Syrian army, important and strong Syrian secret services, but then we see that, you know, the government forces are not able to crush the enemy like people expected it would, and we see terrorist attacks take place in the middle of Damascus almost every day. Were those myths about the Syrian

army and about the strong Syrian secret services?

BA: Usually, in normal circumstances when you have the army and the secret services and the intelligence, we focus on the external enemy even if we have an internal enemy, like terrorism because the society is helping us at least not to provide terrorist's incubator. Now in this case, it is a new kind of war; terrorism through proxies, either Syrians living in Syria or foreign fighters coming from abroad. So, it is a new style of war, this is first and you have to adapt to this style and it takes time, it is not easy. And to say this is as easy as the normal or, let us say, the traditional or regular war, no, it is much more difficult. Second, the support that has been offered to those terrorists in every aspect, including armaments, money and political aspect is unprecedented. So, you have to expect that it is going to be a tough war and a difficult war. You do not expect a small country like Syria to defeat all those countries that have been fighting us through proxies just in days or weeks.

RT: Yes, but when you look at it, I mean on one hand, you have one leader with an army, and he orders this army go straight, go left, go right and the army obeys. On the other hand, you have fractions of terrorists who are not unified and have no one unified strategy to fight you. So, how does that really happen when it comes to fighting each other?

BA: This is not the problem. The problem is that those terrorists are fighting from within the cities, and in the cities you have civilians. When you fight this kind of terrorists, you have to be aware that you should do the minimum damage to the infrastructure and minimum damage to the civilians because you have civilians and you have to fight, you cannot leave terrorists just killing and destroying. So, this is the difficulty in this kind of war.

Bashar Assad speaking with RT's Sophie Shevardnadze
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Without foreign rebel fighters and smuggled weapons, 'we could finish everything in weeks'

RT: You know that the infrastructure and economy are suffering; it is almost as if Syria is going to be fall into decay very soon and the time is against you. In your opinion, how much time do you need to crush the enemy?

BA: You cannot answer this question because no one claimed that he had the answer about when to end the war unless when we have the answer to when they are going to stop smuggling foreign fighters from different parts of the world especially the Middle East and the Islamic world, and when they are going to stop sending armaments to those terrorists. If they stop, this is when I can answer you; I can tell that in weeks we can finish everything. This is not a big problem. But as long as you have continuous supply in terrorists, armaments, logistics and everything else, it is going to be a long-term war.

RT: Also, when you think about it, you have 4,000 km of loosely controlled borders, so you have your enemy that can at any time cross over into Jordan or Turkey to be rearmed, get medical care and come back to fight you!

BA: No country in the world can seal the border. Sometime they use this word which is not correct, even the United States cannot seal its border with Mexico for example. The same can be applied to Russia which is a big country. So, no country can seal the border. You can only have a better situation on the border when you have good relations with your neighbor and this is something we do not have at least with Turkey now. Turkey supports more than

any other country the smuggling of terrorists and armaments.

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'The Syrian Army has no orders to shell Turkish land'

RT: Can I say to you something? I have been in Turkey recently and people there are actually very worried that a war will happen between Syria and Turkey. Do you think a war with Turkey is a realistic scenario?

BA: Rationally, no I do not think so - for two reasons. The war needs public support and the majority of the Turkish people do not need this war. So, I do not think any rational official would think of going against the will of the public in his country and the same for the Syrian people. So, the conflict or difference is not between the Turkish people and the Syrian people; it is about the government and officials, it is between our officials and their officials because of their politics. So, I do not see any war between Syria and Turkey on the horizon.

RT: When was the last time you spoke to Erdogan and how did the talk end?

BA: May 2011, after he won the election.

RT: So, you just congratulated him, and it was the last time

BA: Yes and it was the last time.

RT: Who is shelling Turkey? Is it the government forces or the rebels?

BA: In order to find the answer, you need a joint committee between the two armies in order to know who shells who because on the borders you have a lot of terrorists who have mortars; so, they can do the same. You have to go and investigate the bomb in that place itself and that did not happen. We asked the Turkish government to have this committee but they refused; so, you cannot have the answer. But when you have these terrorists on your borders, you do not exclude them from doing so because the Syrian army does not have any order to shell the Turkish land because we do not find any interest in this, and we do not have any enmity with the Turkish people. We consider them as brothers, so why do it; unless that happened by mistake, then it needs investigation.

RT: Do you accept that it may be mistakenly from the government forces?

BA: That could happen. This is a possibility and in every war you have mistakes. You know in Afghanistan, they always talk about friendly fire if you kill your soldier; this means that it could happen in every war, but we cannot say yes.

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'Erdogan thinks he is a Caliph'

RT: Why has Turkey, which you call a friendly nation, become a foothold for the opposition?

BA: Not Turkey, but only Erdogan's government in order to be precise. Turkish people need

good relations with the Syrian people. Erdogan thinks that if Muslim Brotherhood takes over in the region and especially in Syria, he can guarantee his political future, this is one reason. The other reason, he personally thinks that he is the new sultan of the Ottoman and he can control the region as it was during the Ottoman Empire under a new umbrella. In his heart he thinks he is a caliph. These are the main two reasons for him to shift his policy from zero problems to zero friends.

RT: But it is not just the West that opposes you at this point; there are so many enemies in the Arab world and that is to say like two years ago when someone heard your name in the Arab world they would straighten their ties, and now in the first occasion they betrayed you, why do you have so many enemies in the Arab world?

BA: They are not enemies. The majority of Arab governments support Syria in their heart but they do not dare to say that explicitly.

RT: Why not?

BA: Under pressure by the West, and sometimes under pressure of the petrodollars in the Arab world.

RT: Who supports you from the Arab world?

BA: Many countries support Syria by their hearts but they do not dare to say that explicitly. First of all, Iraq which played a very active role in supporting Syria during the crisis because it is a neighboring country and they understand and recognize that if you have a war inside Syria you will have war in the neighboring countries including Iraq. I think there are other countries which have good position like Algeria, and Oman mainly and there are other countries I would not count all of them now but I would say they have positive position without taking actions.

RT: Saudi Arabia and Qatar, why are they so adamant about you resigning and how would an unstable Middle East fit their agenda?

BA: Let's be frank, I cannot answer on their behalf. They have to answer this question but I could say that the problem between Syria and many countries whether in the Arab world or in the region or in the West, is that we kept saying no when we think that we have to say no, that is the problem. And some countries believe that they can control Syria through orders, through money or petrodollars and this is impossible in Syria, this is the problem. Maybe they want to play a role. We do not have a problem, they can play a role whether they deserve this or not, they can play a role but not to play a role at the expense of our interests.

RT: Is it about controlling Syria or about exporting their vision of Islam to Syria?

BA: You cannot put it as a government policy sometimes. Sometimes you have institutions in certain country, sometime you have persons who try to promote this but they do not announce it as an official policy. So, they did not ask us to promote their, let's say, extremist attitude of their institutions but that happened in reality whether through indirect support of their government or through the foundation from institutions and personnel. So, this is part of the problem, but when I want to talk as a government, I have to talk about the announced policy. The announced policy is like any other policy; it is about the interest, it is about playing a role, but we cannot ignore what you mentioned.

RT: Iran which is a very close ally also is exposed to economic sanctions, also facing a threat of military invasion. If you were faced with an option to cut ties with Iran in exchange for peace in your country, would you go for it?

BA: We do not have contradicting options in this regard because we had good relations with Iran since 1979 till today, and it is getting better every day, but at the same time we are moving towards peace. We had peace process and we had peace negotiations. Iran was not a factor against peace. So, this is misinformation they try to promote in the West that if we need peace, we do not have to have good relation with Iran. There is no relation; it is two completely different subjects. Iran supported Syria, supported our cause, the cause of the occupied land and we have to support them in their cause. This is very simple. Iran is a very important country in the region. If we are looking for stability, we need good relations with Iran. You cannot talk about stability while you have bad relations with Iran, Turkey and your neighbors and so on. This is it.

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'Al-Qaeda's final aim is an Islamic emirate in Syria'

RT: Do you have any information that the Western intelligence is financing rebel fighters here in Syria?

BA: No, so far what we know is that they are offering the know-how support for the terrorists through Turkey and sometimes through Lebanon mainly. But there is other intelligence, not the Western, but the regional intelligence which is very active and more active than the Western one under the supervision of the Western intelligence.

RT: What is the role of Al-Qaeda in Syria at this point? Are they controlling any of the rebel coalition forces?

BA: No, I do not think they are looking to control; they are looking to create their own kingdoms or emirates in their language, but they mainly try now to scare the people through explosions, assassinations, suicide bombers and things like this to push the people towards desperation and to accept them as reality. So, they go step by step but their final aim is to have this, let's say, Islamic Emirate in Syria where they can promote their own ideology in the rest of the world.

RT: From those who are fighting you and those who are against you, who would you talk to?

BA: We talk to anyone who has genuine will to help Syria, but we do not waste our time with anyone who wants to use our crisis for his own personal interests.

RT: There has been many times...not you but the government forces have been accused for many times of war crimes against your own civilians, do you accept that the government forces have committed war crimes against their own civilians?

BA: We are fighting terrorism. We are implementing our constitution by protecting the Syrian people. Let's go back to what happened in Russia more than a decade ago when you faced terrorism in Chechnya and other places; they attacked people in theaters and schools and so on, and the army in Russia protected the people, would you call it war crimes?! No, you would not. Two days ago, Amnesty International recognized the crimes that were

committed few days ago by the armed groups when they captured soldiers and executed them. Also Human Rights Watch recognized this. Human Rights Watch recognized more than once the crimes of those terrorist groups and few days ago it described these crimes as war crimes, this is the first point. The second point, if you have an army that committed a crime against its own people, this is devoid of logic because the Syrian Army is made up of Syrian people. If you want to commit a crime against your people, then the army will divide, will disintegrate. So, you cannot have a strong army while you are killing your people. Third, the army cannot withstand for twenty months in these difficult circumstances without having the embrace of the public in Syria. So, how could you have this embracement while you are killing your people?! This is a contradiction. So, this is the answer.

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'I must live in Syria and die in Syria'

RT: When was the last time you spoke to a Western leader?

BA: It was before the crisis.

RT: Was there any time at which they try to give you conditions that if you left the post of presidency then there will be peace in Syria or no?

BA: No, they did not propose it directly, no, but whether they propose that directly or indirectly, it is a matter of sovereignty; only the Syrian people will talk about this. Whoever talks about this in the media or in a statement directly or indirectly has no meaning and has no weight in Syria.

RT: Do you even have a choice because from what it seems from the outside that would not have anywhere to go. Where would you go if you want to leave?

BA: To Syria. I would go from Syria to Syria. This is the only place where we can live. I am not a puppet. I was not made by the West to go to the West or to any other country. I am Syrian, I was made in Syria, I have to live in Syria and die in Syria.

'I believe in democracy and dialogue - but we must be realistic'

RT: Do you think that at this point there is any chance for diplomacy or talks or only the army can get it done?

BA: I always believe in diplomacy and I always believe in dialogue even with those who do not understand or believe in it. We have to keep trying. I think that we will always achieve a partial success. We have to look for this partial success before we achieve the complete success. But we have to be realistic. You do not think that only dialogue can make you achieve something because those people who committed these acts they are of two kinds: one of them does not believe in dialogue, especially the extremists, and you have the outlaws who have been convicted by the court years ago before the crisis and their natural enemy is the government because they are going to be detained if we have a normal situation in Syria. The other part of them is the people who have been supplied by the outside, and they can only be committed to the governments which paid them the money and supplied them with the armament; they do not have a choice because they do not own

their own decision. So, you have to be realistic. And you have the third part of the people whether militants or politicians who can accept the dialogue. That's why we have been in this dialogue for months now even with militants and many of them gave up their armaments and they went back to their normal life.

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'The price of a foreign invasion will be more than the world can afford'

RT: Do you think a foreign invasion is imminent?

BA: I think the price of this invasion if it happened is going to be more than the whole world can afford because if you have a problem in Syria, and we are the last stronghold of secularism and stability in the region and coexistence, let's say, it will have a domino effect that will affect the world from the Atlantic to the Pacific and you know the implication on the rest of the world. I do not think the West is going in that direction, but if they do so, nobody can tell what is next.

RT: Mr. President, do you blame yourself for anything?

BA: Normally you have to find mistakes you do with every decision, otherwise you are not human.

RT: What is your biggest mistake?

BA: I do not remember now to be frank. But I always, even before taking the decision, consider that part of it will be wrong but you cannot tell about your mistakes now. Sometimes, especially during crisis, you do not see what is right and what is wrong until you overcome the situation that you are in. I would not be objective to talk about mistakes now because we still in the middle of the crisis.

RT: So, you do not have regrets yet?

BA: Not now. When everything is clear, you can talk about your mistakes, and definitely you have mistakes and that is normal.

RT: If today was March 15, 2011, that is when the protest started to escalate and grow, what would you do differently?

BA: I would do what I did on March 15.

RT: Exactly the same?

BA: Exactly the same: ask different parties to have dialogue and stand against terrorists because that is how it started. It did not start as marches; the umbrella or cover was the marches, but within those marches you had militants who started shooting civilians and the army at the same time. May be on the tactical level, you could have done something different but as a president you are not tactical, you always take the decision on a strategic level which is something different.

RT: President al-Assad, how do you see yourself in ten-years' time?

BA: I see myself through my country; I cannot see myself but my country in ten-years' time. This is where I can see myself.

RT: Do you see yourself in Syria?

BA: Definitely, I have to be in Syria. It is not about the position. I do not see myself whether a president or not. This is not my interest. I can see myself in this country as safe country, stable country and more prosperous country.

RT: President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, thank you for talking to RT.

BA: Thank you for coming to Syria, again.

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