

## Just Back From Syria, Rep. Tulsi Gabbard Brings Message: ‘There Are No Moderate Rebels’

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*Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, a Hawaii Democrat, says she made a secret, four-day trip to Syria — meeting with ordinary people and even President Bashar al-Assad — because the suffering of the Syrian people “has been weighing heavily on my heart.”*

“I wanted to see if there was in some small way, a way that I could express the love and the aloha and the care that the American people have for the people of Syria, and to see firsthand what was happening there, to see that situation there,” Gabbard told CNN’s “The Lead” with Jake Tapper on Wednesday.

She returned with a message:

I’ll tell you what I heard from the Syrian people that I met with, Jake, walking down the street in Aleppo, in Damascus, hearing from them.

They expressed happiness and joy at seeing an American walking through their streets. But they also asked why the U.S. and its allies are providing support and arms to terrorist groups like al-Nusra, al-Qaida or al-Sham, ISIS who are on the ground there, raping, kidnapping, torturing and killing the Syrian people.

“They asked me, why is the United States and its allies supporting these terrorist groups who are destroying Syria when it was al Qaida who attacked the United States on 9/11, not Syria. I didn’t have an answer for them,” Gabbard said.

The reality is... every place that I went, every person that I spoke to, I asked this question to them, and without hesitation, they said, there are no moderate rebels. Who are these moderate rebels that people keep speaking of?



Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawaii) meets with Syrian religious leaders in Aleppo, led by Archbishop Denys Antoine Chahda of the Syrian Catholic Church of Aleppo, and joined by Archbishop Joseph Tabji of

Maronite Church of Aleppo, Rev. Ibrahim Nseir of the Arab Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Aleppo, and others. Each called for peace, and an end to foreign support of terrorists who are trying to rid Syria of its secular, pluralistic, free society. (Photo from Gabbard's website, courtesy of Abraham Williams)

Regardless of the name of these groups, the strongest fighting force on the ground in Syria is al Nusra, or al Qaida and ISIS. That is a fact," Gabbard said.

There is a number of different, other groups — all of them essentially are fighting alongside, with, or under the command of the strongest group on the ground that's trying to overthrow Assad.

The Syrian people recognize and they know that if President Assad is overthrown, then al Qaida — or a group like al Qaida, that has been killing Christians, killing people simply because of their religion, or because they won't support their terror activities, they will take charge of all of Syria.

This is the reality that the people of Syria are facing on the ground, and why they are pleading with us here in the United States to stop supporting these terrorist groups. Let the Syrian people themselves determine their future, not the United States, not some foreign country.

Gabbard said initially, she didn't plan to meet with President Assad: "When the opportunity arose to meet with him, I did so because I felt it's important that if we profess to truly care about the Syrian people, about their suffering, then we've got to be able to meet with anyone that we need to if there is a possibility that we could achieve peace, and that's exactly what we talked about."

Tapper noted that Assad is responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of people being forced from their homes and even their country during the five-year civil war:

"Did you have any compunctions about meeting with somebody like that, giving him any sort of enhanced credibility because a member of the United States Congress would meet with someone like that?" Tapper asked.

"Whatever you think about President Assad, the fact is that he is the president of Syria," Tulsi replied. "In order for any peace agreement, in order for any possibility of a viable peace agreement to occur, there has to be a conversation with him," Gabbard said.

The Syrian people will determine his outcome and what happens with their government and their future, but our focus, my focus, my commitment is on ending this war that has caused so much suffering to the Syrian people.

In a speech on the House floor earlier this month, Gabbard criticized America's "interventionist wars."

Our limited resources should go toward rebuilding our communities here at home, not fueling more counterproductive regime change wars abroad.

She urged her fellow lawmakers to support her bill, the “Stop Arming Terrorists Act,” legislation that would stop the U.S. government from using taxpayer dollars to directly or indirectly support groups allied with terrorist groups such as ISIS and al Qaeda in their war to overthrow the Syrian government.

“The fact that our resources are being used to strengthen the very terrorist groups we should be focused on defeating should alarm every American,” Gabbard said.

I urge my colleagues to support this [bipartisan legislation](#) and stop this madness.”

Gabbard supported Sen. Bernie Sanders for president, but after the election, she was one of many people invited to meet with President-elect Donald Trump at Trump Tower in New York.

“President-elect Trump asked me to meet with him about our current policies regarding Syria, our fight against terrorist groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS, as well as other foreign policy challenges we face,” Gabbard said about the meeting.

I felt it important to take the opportunity to meet with the President-elect now before the drumbeats of war that neocons have been beating drag us into an escalation of the war to overthrow the Syrian government — a war which has already cost hundreds of thousands of lives and forced millions of refugees to flee their homes in search of safety for themselves and their families.

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