

President Al-Assad Interview: “The West Is Not Serious in Fighting Terrorists”

"Russia's Policy towards Syria Is Based on Values and Interests"

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Damascus, SANA – President Bashar al-Assad gave an interview to the Spanish EFE news agency in which he stressed that the Russians' values and interests in their policy towards Syria are not in contradiction, noting that as long as the US is not serious in fighting the terrorists, the West won't be serious.

The following is the full text of the interview:

Question 1: Thank you very much, Mr. President, for your hospitality and for giving the Spanish News Agency EFE the opportunity to understand what is the situation in your country. Okay, on November 14th, the world powers, including Russia and Iran, agreed in Vienna on a timetable for a political solution for the Syria crisis. According to this timetable, the negotiations between your government and the moderate opposition should start on January 1st. Are you ready to start those negotiations?

President Assad: You are most welcome in Syria. Since the very beginning of the conflict in Syria, we adopted the dialogue approach with every party that is involved in the Syrian conflict, and we dealt positively, responded positively, to every initiative that has been launched by different states around the world regardless of the real intention and the genuineness of the people or the officials who started those initiatives. So, we were ready, and we are ready today to start the negotiations with the opposition. But it depends on the definition of opposition. Opposition, for everyone in this world, doesn't mean militant. There's a big difference between militants, terrorists, and opposition. Opposition is a political term, not a military term. So, talking about the concept is different from the practice, because so far, we've been seeing that some countries, including Saudi Arabia, the United States, and some Western countries wanted the terrorist groups to join these negotiations. They want the Syrian government to negotiate with the terrorists, something I don't think anyone would accept in any country.

Question 2: Would you be ready to negotiate, to dialogue, with the opposition groups that are right now gathering in Riyadh?

President Assad: It's the same, because they are a mixture of political opposition and militants. Let me be realistic; regarding the militants in Syria, we already had some dialogue with some groups, not organizations, for one reason, and the reason was to reach a situation where they give up their armaments and either join the government or go back to their normal life, having amnesty from the government. This is the only way to deal with the militants in Syria.

Whenever they want to change their approach, give up the armaments, we are ready, while to deal with them as a political entity, this is something we completely refuse. This is first. Regarding what they call political opposition, you as a Spanish [person], when you look at the opposition in your country, it's self-evident that the opposition is a Spanish opposition, is related to the Spanish grassroots, Spanish citizens. It cannot be opposition while it's related and beholden to any other country, to a foreign country, no matter which country. So, again, it depends on which group are we talking about in Saudi Arabia. People that have been made as opposition in Saudi Arabia, in Qatar, in France, in the UK, in the US. So, as a principle, we have to, we are ready, but at the end, if you want to reach something, to have successful and fruitful dialogue, you need to deal with the real, patriotic, national opposition that has grassroots in Syria and is only related to the Syrian people, not to any other state or regime in the world.



Question 3: Will the Syrian delegation attend the conference in New York in case this conference was confirmed, in the next weeks?

There's no point of meeting in New York or anywhere else without defining terrorist groups

President Assad: It's not confirmed yet. The recent Russian statement said they preferred it to be, I think, in Vienna. This is first. Second, they said it's not appropriate before defining which are the terrorist groups and which are not, which is very realistic and logical. For us, in Syria, everyone who holds a machinegun is a terrorist, so without defining this term, reaching a definition, there's no point of just meeting in New York, or anywhere else.

Question 4: Okay, Mr. President, in your opinion, what can be done to put an end to "Daesh?"

President Assad: This is a very complicated issue, not because of ISIS, because ISIS is an organization. There's something more dangerous to be dealt with, which is the reasons. First of all, the ideology, something that's been instilled in the minds of the people or the society in the Muslim world for decades now, because of the Wahabi institutions, because of the Saudi money that's been paid to support this kind of dark and resentful ideology. Without dealing with this ideology, it's just a waste of time to say we are going to deal with Daesh or al-Nusra or any other organization that belongs to Al Qaeda. Daesh-Al Qaeda and al-Nusra-Al

Qaeda, and you have many other organizations that have the same ideology.

So, this is something that should be dealt with on the long term; how to prevent those Wahabi institutions and Saudi money from reaching the Muslim institutions around the world in order to have more extremism and terrorism spreading around the world. This is first. Second, we have to talk about the short term and dealing with the situation now, Daesh in Syria and Iraq, mainly. Of course, fighting terrorism is another self-evident answer to that question, but we are talking about an ideology and an organization that has unlimited ability to recruit terrorists from around the world. In Syria, we have more than 100 nationalities fighting with the extremists and terrorists,

Al Qaeda and al-Nusra and others. The first step we should take in order to solve this problem is to stop the flood of terrorists, especially through Turkey to Syria and to Iraq, and of course we have to stop the flowing of money, Saudi money and other Wahabi money and Qatari money to those terrorists through Turkey, and the armaments, and every other logistical support. This is how we can start, then later, if you want to talk about the rest, it could be political, it could be economic, it could be cultural, it has many aspects, but for the time being, we have to start with stopping the flow, and at the same time fighting terrorists from within Syria by the Syrian Army and by whoever wants to support the Syrian Army.

Question 5: Who buys the oil from Daesh? Which countries are behind Daesh?

Turkey is the only lifeline for ISIS

President Assad: The Russians last week published on TV pictures and videos of trucks carrying oil crossing the Syrian-Turkish borders. Of course, the Turks denied this, it's very easy to deny, but let's think about the reality. Most of the oil in Syria is in the northern part of Syria. If they want to export it to Iraq, that's impossible, because every party in Iraq is fighting ISIS. In Syria, it's the same. In Lebanon, it's very far. Jordan in the south is very far. So, the only lifeline for ISIS is Turkey. Those trucks moving the oil from Syria to Turkey, and Turkey selling this cheap oil to the rest of the world. I don't think anyone has any doubt about this indubitable reality.

Question 6: Which countries are behind Daesh?

Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar are the main perpetrators in the atrocities of ISIS

President Assad: You have states, mainly Saudi Arabia, because both this country and this organization do the beheading, both following the Wahabi ideology, both of them reject anyone who is not like them; not only not Muslim, but who is Muslim but not like them. That Muslim could belong to the same sect, but if he's not like them, he's rejected. So, Saudi Arabia is the main supporter of this kind of organization. Of course, you have figures, you have different people who have the same ideology or same belief, they send money privately, but it's not only who sends the money, who facilitates the reaching of the money to those organizations. How could organizations considered [to be] terrorist around the world like ISIS or al-Nusra have hundreds of millions, to have this recruits, to have a nearly full army like any other state, if they don't have direct support, source of money, and direct support like Turkey in particular. So, Saudi Arabia and Turkey and Qatar are the main perpetrators in the atrocities of ISIS.

Question 7: Yesterday we saw the mortars falling near Damascus. It seems that this

fighting is far from ending. When do you think that the war will be over in Syria?

Pressure Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and this conflict will end in less than a year

President Assad: If you want to talk about the Syrian conflict as an isolated conflict with the same situation now, the same Syrian troops and Syria's allies, and the terrorists from the other side, we could end it in a few months. It's not very complicated in either meaning, whether militarily or politically. It's not complicated. But as long as you're talking about a lifeline that isn't being suffocated for those terrorists, having recruits on daily basis, in every sense, money, armaments, human resources, everything, that will make it much longer. Of course it's going to have a heavy price. But at the end, we are making advancement. I'm not saying that we're not making advancement. The situation on the military level is much better than before, but again, the price is very high. That's why I said earlier if you want to end it shorter, and most of the world is saying now they want to see an end to this crisis, okay, make pressure on those countries that, you know them, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, then this conflict will end in less than a year, definitely.

Question 8: Is there any kind of military coordination between the Syrian Army and the bombing attacks of the US-led coalition?

Russian and Syrian armies achieved in a few weeks much better than the US-led alliance

President Assad: Not at all, not at all, not a single connection regarding this sector, let's say, military sector. That's why, for more than one year now, they've been bombing ISIS, and at the same time ISIS is expanding, because you cannot deal with terrorists from the air. You have to deal with them from the ground, and that's why when the Russians came and started their participation in the war against terrorism, the achievement of the Russian and Syrian armies in a few weeks was much better than the alliance has achieved during more than a year, and actually didn't achieve anything to say more, because they were supporting ISIS, maybe indirectly, because it was expanding, and you have more recruits coming. So, we cannot say that they achieved something in reality.

Question 9: What do you think about Obama's role in this crisis?

As long as the US is not serious in fighting the terrorists, the West won't be serious

President Assad: Let's talk about the American administration, because Obama, at the end, is part of the administration. You have lobbies in the United States. From the very beginning, the United States provided those terrorists with different political covers. At the very beginning they called them "peaceful demonstrations" then when they appeared that they are terrorists they said they are "moderate terrorists," then at the end they have to say that you have ISIS and al-Nusra, but at the end, they're not objective, they don't dare to say that they were wrong. They don't dare to say that Qatar at the very beginning, and then Saudi Arabia, have misled them. This is first. Second, as long as the United States is not serious in fighting the terrorists, we cannot expect the rest of the West to be serious, because they are the allies of the United States, and so far, in brief, let's say, the role of the Americans in that situation is not to destroy ISIS or the extremism or the terrorism, and Obama said it; he said he wants to contain it. What does it mean? It means to allow you to move somewhere, while not to let you go somewhere else. It's like to define the border of the harmful effect of ISIS. So, we don't think that the Americans are genuine in fighting the terrorism.

Question 10: And what about French President Francois Hollande? He has talked about destroying ISIS. Do you think that at some point at the end, the French will cooperate with your government?

President Assad: Look at what he did after the recent shootings in Paris last month. They started, the French aircrafts, started attacking ISIS with heavy bombardments. They said they wanted to fight - he said we're going to be in a war with terrorism. What does it mean? It means before the shootings, they weren't in a war with terrorism. Why didn't they do the same before the war? It means this heavy bombardment is just to dissipate the anger within the French public opinion, not to fight terrorism. If you want to fight terrorism, you don't wait for a shooting in order to fight terrorism. Fighting terrorism is a principle. It's not a transient situation where you feel you're angry and you want to attack the terrorists. You have to have value, principle, in order to defeat it, and it should be a sustainable kind of fighting. So, this is another proof that the French are not serious in fighting terrorism.

Question 11: And what do you think about the EU in general? The EU position on this conflict? Could Europe do something more inside Europe against Jihadist groups?

Europe can play a role, but it is now just a satellite to the US policy

President Assad: Of course they can, definitely. They have the ability, but it's not only about the ability; it's about the will. The question that we've been asking - not only during the crisis, before the crisis, for the last, let's say, more than ten years, especially after the war on Iraq: does Europe exist politically anymore, or is it just a satellite to the United States policy? So far, we don't see any independent political position. Some, you have some cases, let's say, we don't put everyone in one basket, and the proof is the relation between Europe and Russia. The United States pushed Europe to do something against its interests, to make embargo on Russia. This is not realistic, not logical. So, of course it can, of course it has interest to fight terrorism like we have the same interest, and the recent shooting and what happened in Madrid in 2004 and 2001 in New York and then in London, and recently in California, this is proof that everyone has interest to do, but who has the will and who has the vision? That is the question that I don't have an answer about it now, but in the meantime, I'm not optimistic about this will.

Question 12: What has President Vladimir Putin asked of you in return for Russian military aid?

President Putin didn't ask for anything in return for Russian military aid

President Assad: He didn't ask for anything in return for a simple reason; because it's not a trade. Actually, the normal relation between two countries is a relation about mutual interest. The question is what is the mutual interest between Syria and Russia? Does Russia have interest in having more terrorism in Syria? The collapse of the Syrian state? Anarchy? No, they don't have. So, let's say in return, Russia have the stability of Syria, of Iraq, of our region - we're not far from Russia, of Russia, and let me go far beyond that, of Europe. Russia now, in Syria, they are defending Europe directly, and again, the recent terrorist events in Europe is the proof that what's going on here will affect them positively and negatively.

Question 13: Okay, has Putin asked you to resign your position of president at some point?

Staying in or leaving office depends on the Syrian people's option

President Assad: First of all, the question is: what is the relation between the president staying in power or resigning with the conflict? That is the first question we have to ask. This kind of personalizing the problem just to be used as a cover to say that "there's no problem with the terrorism, no country interfering from the outside, sending money and armaments to the Syrian rebels in order to make chaos and anarchy. Actually, this is a president who wants to stay in power and people who are fighting for freedom, and he's oppressing them and killing them, and that's why they are revolting." This is a very romantic picture for, let's say, teenagers, like a love story for teenagers. Reality is not like this. The question is if it's part of the solution in Syria. Political solution, that means when I say political solution doesn't mean Western or external; it should be a Syrian solution. When the Syrian people doesn't want you to be a president, you have to leave the same day, not the other day. The same day. This is a principle for me. If I think that I can help my country, especially in a crisis, and the Syrian people still support me - I don't say the Syrian people; the majority of the Syrian people to be more precise - of course I have to stay. That's self-evident.

Question 14: As a hypothesis, would you accept the possibility of leaving Syria in the future and leaving to a friendly country if this was the condition for a final political arrangement?

President Assad: For me leaving the position?

Question 15: Leaving the position and leaving Syria.

President Assad: No, leaving Syria, I never thought about leaving Syria under any circumstances, in any situation, something I never put in my mind, like the Americans say "plan B" or "plan C." Actually, no. But again, the same answer: that depends on the Syrian population; would they support you or not? If you have the support, it means you're not the problem, because if you are the problem as a person, the Syrian people will be against you. What's the point of the people, of the majority, supporting you, while you are the reason of the conflict? This is the first aspect. The second aspect, if I have a problem with the Syrians, with the majority of the Syrians, and you have the national and regional countries being against me, and the West, most of the West, the United States, their allies, the strongest countries and the richest countries in the world against me, and I'm against the Syrian people, how can I be president? It's not logical. I'm being here after five years - nearly five years - of the war, because I have the support of the majority of the Syrians.

Question 16: Is it true that Russia will have another military base in Syria?

If there will be another Russian military base in Syria, they would have announced it

President Assad: No, that's not true, and two days ago, they denied this allegation. If there is, they would have announced it, and we would have announced it at the same time, so no.

Question 17: Are the Iranians planning to build here their own military base?

President Assad: No. They never thought about it, never discussed this.

Question 18: Okay. Is it possible to include President Erdogan in solution for the crisis? What is the role of Turkey in this crisis?

Erdogan is a Muslim Brotherhood ideological person, we don't expect him to change

President Assad: As a principle, if he's willing to get away from his criminal attitude that he's been adopting since the beginning of the crisis by supporting the terrorists in every way, we don't have a problem. We don't have a problem. At the end, we will be ready to welcome any help or positive participation from anywhere. That's in principle. So, whoever's been complicit against Syria, we don't have a problem with, but do we expect Erdogan to change? No, for one reason, because Erdogan is a Muslim Brotherhood ideological person, so he cannot go against his ideology. He's not a pragmatic man who thinks about the interests of his country. He's working against the interests of his country for the sake of his ideology, whether it's realistic or not. So we don't expect Erdogan to change in that way.

Question 19: Mr. President, US Secretary of State John Kerry has announced recently that he will travel to Moscow to see President Putin and the Russian Foreign Minister. Don't you fear that a kind of trade between the US and Moscow, Ukraine against Syria, could be in preparation?

No Russia-West deal against Syria, Russia's policy towards Syria is based on values and interests

President Assad: No, because it's been now nearly five years, and we've been hearing that argument, or let's say, kind of, how to say, idea, by the Western officials, just to make a wedge, a kind of wedge between Syria and Russia. The Russians are pragmatic, but at the same time they are adopting a moral policy based on values and principles, not only on interests, and the good thing in their position is that there's no conflict or contradiction between their values and their interests. This is first. Second, The Russians know very well that any solution, if there's a trade for example for the solution, any solution cannot be implemented if it's not a compromise between the Syrians. So, Russia and the United States and any other country in this world cannot make a deal; we can make the deal with ourselves, Syrians can make a deal with the Syrians, can make dialogue with the Syrians. That's what the Russians know very well. That's why they don't make such mistakes, beside the values that they have.

Question 20: In relation with Turkey again, what do you see about the downing of the Russian aircraft by Turkey? Was it an accident or premeditated?

President Assad: Since the Russian military participation in Syria regarding fighting against the terrorists' organizations, the situation on the ground has changed in a positive way, and for Erdogan, that would bring his ambitions to failure, and if Erdogan failed in Syria, as he looked at it, that would be his political demise; it is like sounding the death knell of his political future, his ambitions to make Turkey the hub for the Brotherhood in the region by having a Brotherhood government and having following or satellite Brotherhood governments around the world. He thinks the last bastion of his dream is Syria. If he failed in Syria, as he failed in Egypt and as he failed in other places, he will think that this is the end of his career. So, his reaction was an unwise reaction but reflected not his way of thinking, but actually his instinct, his visceral instinct towards the Russian issue. This is the first part of the shooting. The second one, he thought the NATO would help him, and he would bring the NATO to conflict with Russia and the result would be more complicated situation in Syria on the ground, and may be his dream of having a no-fly zone where he can send those terrorists to Syria and they can use them as another state in front of the legitimate state here in Syria. That was his ambition, his way of thinking, as we think, and his plan in Syria.

Question 21: Mr. President, the US holds you responsible for the civil war and the rise of terrorism in Syria. Your enemies blame you for the death of 250 thousand in Syria since the beginning of the war. They also accused you of attacking opposition groups and civilians. How you defend yourself against those accusations?

President Assad: Actually, you cannot shoot yourself in the foot. Now the whole war in Syria, since the beginning of the conflict, was about who is going to bring more Syrians to his side. That was the war from the very beginning. How can you shoot the people and get their support? This is impossible. But at the same time, there is no good war; every war is a bad war. So whenever you have a war – something you should avoid but you cannot avoid – any war, will have civilian casualties, will have innocent casualties. This is a very bad and dangerous aspect in any war. That is why we have to end the war. While to say that the government attacked the civilians, what is the point, what do you get from attacking the civilians? Actually, the reality if you want to go around in Syria, you will be surprised that most of the families of the militants, they don't live with them, they live under the umbrella of the government, and they get the support of the government, which is another proof that we don't work against the civilians or kill them, otherwise they would not come to the government's side. So, those allegations are false allegations.

Question 22: Mr. President, we want you to send a message to the Syrian refugees that have fled the country, many of them fled to Europe and even to Spain. What message do you have for them?

European governments' embargo and support to terrorists created the migration issue

President Assad: Most of those refugees have contact with their families in Syria, so we're still in contact with them. The majority of those refugees are government supporters, but they left because of the situation created by the terrorists, the direct threatening, killing, and because the terrorists destroyed the infrastructure, and by the embargo by the West on Syria where the basic life needs are not affordable anymore. So, actually, I don't have to send them a message to them because they are going to come back when the situation is better. Most of them like their country, they love this country. Actually, the message I would like to send is to the European governments: they brought them, they created the situation, they helped the terrorists, and they made the embargo that has played directly into the hands of those terrorists and helped those people leaving Syria to other countries. So, if you are working for the sake of the Syrian people, as you said, the first thing you do is to lift the embargo. The second thing to do is to stop the flooding of terrorists. So, I think the message to the western governments who helped them going and live in their countries.

Question 23: Would you pardon the terrorists if they lay down their weapons?

President Assad: Of course, that is already happening in Syria. What we called "the reconciliation" is the only real political solution that has reached fruitful solution and positive reality in different places in Syria. The crux of the reconciliation is based on them giving up their armaments as terrorists and the government gives them amnesty or pardon. Of course, this the only way, and this is the good way I think to solve the problem.

Question 24: Okay, two last questions; if you go back to March 2011, would you make any different decisions?

President Assad: On daily basis, as a human, every day you have something you wish you

did it in a better way. That is natural, because you have a lot of details, but if we want to talk about the pillars of our policy, it depends on two things. First of all, dialogue from the very first day, although we believed that it wasn't about political problems at the very beginning, in spite of that we said we are ready for political dialogue, we are ready to change the constitution, we are ready to change many laws, and we did it, we did in 2012, the next year after the conflict has begun. At the same time, from the very beginning we said we are going to fight terrorism and terrorists. There is no way to change either to adopt dialogue or fight terrorism. Anything else is not a pillar, I mean if you talk about the daily practice, of course you have to do a lot of mistakes in daily practice whether my practice and other institutions' practice or other official's practice, that's self-evident, there's nothing in my mind now, but maybe one of the things I wouldn't do it again is to trust many officials, Western or regional, Arabs, or like Turkish or others, to trust them, to think that they really wanted to help Syria at some point. This is one of the things that I wouldn't do gain.

Question 25: How do you explain to your children what is happening in Syria? Would you like them to follow your footsteps?

President Assad: To follow my steps in politics you mean?

Question 26: Yes.

President Assad: I think politics is not a job, and it is not a book you read, and it is not a specialty you do at the university. So, you cannot teach your children to be politicians; you can teach them a job. Actually, politics is everything in life; it is the sum of economy, society, culture, everything, and the fact that you live on a daily basis. So as a result, that depends on the path of your children if they go in that regard. For me, the most important thing is to help them in helping their country, but how? Should they be politicians in the future, or should they be in any other job? This is not a very important issue for me. But I wouldn't try to influence them; they have to choose their path. I have to explain as much as I can from our reality about our country so that they can read it very well and they can decide which path they want to follow.

Journalist: Thank you very much Mr. President for the interview and for your time.

President Assad: Thank you for coming to Syria

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