

## President al-Assad: “Syria will Never become a Western Puppet State”

We will fight terrorism and freely build relationships that best serve the interests of the Syrians

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*President Bashar al-Assad stressed that Syria is a sovereign country that will fight terrorism and will freely build relationships with countries in a way that best serves the interests of the Syrian people.*

*In an interview with the Russian newspaper of Izvestia, President al-Assad stressed that “the majority of those we are fighting are Takfiris, who adopt the al-Qaeda doctrine, in addition to a small number of outlaws.”*

*On the alleged use of chemical weapons, President al-Assad said that the statements by the US administration, the West and other countries were made with disdain and blatant disrespect of their own public opinion, adding that “there isn’t a body in the world, let alone a superpower, that makes an accusation and then goes about collecting evidence to prove its point.”*

*His Excellency stressed that these accusations are completely politicised and come on the back of the advances made by the Syrian Army against the terrorists.*

Here is the full content of the interview:

Q1 Interviewer: Mr President, the most pressing question today is the current situation in Syria. What parts of the country remain under the rebels’ control?

President al-Assad: From our perspective, it’s not a matter of labelling areas as controlled by terrorists or by the government; we are not dealing with a conventional occupation to allow us to contextualise it in this manner. We are fighting terrorists infiltrating particular regions, towns or peripheral city areas. They wreak havoc, vandalise, destroy infrastructure and kill innocent civilians simply because they denounce them. The army mobilises into these areas with the security forces and law enforcement agencies to eradicate the terrorists, those who survive relocate to other areas. Therefore, the essence of our action is striking terrorism.

Our challenge, which has protracted the situation, is the influx of large amounts of terrorists from other countries – estimated in the tens of thousands at the very least. As long as they continue to receive financial and military aid, we will continue to strike them. I can confirm that there has not been any instance where the Syrian Army has planned to enter a particular location and has not succeeded in eliminating the terrorists within it.

The majority of those we are fighting are Takfiris, who adopt the al-Qaeda doctrine, in addition to a small number of outlaws, so as I said this not about who controls more areas of land. Wherever

terrorism strikes, we shall strike back.

Q2 Interviewer: Yet, Western mainstream media claim that the terrorists control 40% to 70% of Syrian territory; what is the reality?

President al-Assad: There isn't an army in the world that can be present with its armament in every corner of any given country. The terrorists exploit this, and violate areas where the army is not present. They escape from one area to another, and we continue to eradicate them from these areas with great success. Therefore, I reiterate, the issue is not the size of the territories they infiltrate but the large influx of terrorists coming from abroad.

The more significant criterion to evaluate success is - has the Syrian Army been able to enter any area infiltrated by terrorists and defeat them? Most certainly the answer is yes; the army has always succeeded in this and continues to do so. However, this takes time because these types of wars do not end suddenly, they protract for prolonged periods and as such carry a heavy price. Even when we have eradicated all the terrorists, we will have paid a hefty price.

Q3 Interviewer: Mr President, you have spoken of Islamist Takfiri extremists' fighters who have entered Syria. Are they fragmented groups who fight sporadically? Or do they belong to a coherent major force that seeks to destroy the security and stability in Syria and the whole Middle East?

President al-Assad: They have both traits. They are similar in that they all share the same extremist Takfiri doctrine of certain individuals such as Zawahiri; they also have similar or identical financial backing and military support. They differ on the ground in that they are incoherent and scattered with each group adhering to a separate leader and pursuing different agendas. Of course it is well known that countries, such as Saudi Arabia, who hold the purse strings can shape and manipulate them to suit their own interests.

Ideologically, these countries mobilise them through direct or indirect means as extremist tools. If they declare that Muslims must pursue Jihad in Syria, thousands of fighters will respond. Financially, those who finance and arm such groups can instruct them to carry out acts of terrorism and spread anarchy. The influence over them is synergised when a country such as Saudi Arabia directs them through both the Wahhabi ideology and their financial means.



Q4 Interviewer: The Syrian government claims a strong link between Israel and the terrorists. How can you explain this? It is commonly perceived that the extremist Islamists loathe Israel and become hysterical upon hearing its name.

President al-Assad: If this was the case, why is it then that when we strike the terrorists at the frontier, Israel strikes at our forces to alleviate the pressure off of them? Why, when we blockade them into an area does Israel let them through their barricades so they can come round and re-attack from another direction? Why has Israel carried out direct strikes against the Syrian Army on more than one occasion in recent months? So clearly this perception is inaccurate. It is Israel who has publically declared its cooperation with these terrorists and treated them in Israeli hospitals.

If these terrorist groups were indeed hostile to Israel and hysterical even on the mention of the word as you mention, why have they fought the Soviet Union, Syria and Egypt, whilst never carrying out a single strike against Israel? Who originally created these terrorist groups? These groups were initially created in the early 80's by the United States and the West, with Saudi funding, to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. So logically speaking, how could such groups manufactured by the US and the

West ever strike Israel!

Q5 Interviewer: Mr. President, this interview will be translated into several international languages, and shall be read by world leaders, some who may currently be working against you. What would you like to say to them?

President al-Assad: Today there are many Western politicians, but very few statesmen. Some of these politicians do not read history or even learn from it, whilst others do not even remember recent events. Have these politicians learned any lessons from the past 50 years at least? Have they not realised that since the Vietnam War, all the wars their predecessors have waged have failed? Have they not learned that they have gained nothing from these wars but the destruction of the countries they fought, which has had a destabilising effect on the Middle East and other parts of the world? Have they not comprehended that all of these wars have not made people in the region appreciate them or believe in their policies?

From another perspective, these politicians should know that terrorism is not a winning card you play when it suits you and keep it in your pocket when it doesn't. Terrorism is like a scorpion; it can unexpectedly sting you at any time. Therefore, you cannot support terrorism in Syria whilst fighting it in Mali; you cannot support terrorism in Chechnya and fight it in Afghanistan.

To be very precise, I am referring to the West and not all world leaders, if these western leaders are looking to achieve their interests, they need to listen to their own constituents and to the people in this region rather than seeking to install 'puppet' leaders, in the hope that they would be able to deliver their objectives. In doing so, western policy may become more realistic in the region.

Our message to the world is straightforward: *Syria will never become a Western 'puppet' state. We are an independent country; we will fight terrorism and we will freely build relationships with countries in a way that best serves the interests of the Syrian people.*

Q6 Interviewer: On Wednesday, the rebels accused the Syrian government of using chemical weapons; some Western leaders adopted these accusations. What is your response to this? Will you allow the UN inspectors access to the site to investigate the incident?

President al-Assad: The statements by the American administration, the West and other countries were made with disdain and blatant disrespect of their own public opinion; there isn't a body in the world, let alone a superpower, that makes an accusation and then goes about collecting evidence to prove its point. The American administration made the accusation on Wednesday and two days later announced that they would start to collect the evidence - what evidence is it going to gather from afar?!

They claim that the area in question is under the control of the rebels and that the Syrian Army used chemical weapons. In fact, the area is in contiguity with the Syrian Army positions, so how is it possible that any country would use chemical weapons, or any weapons of mass destruction, in an area where its own forces are located; this is preposterous! These accusations are completely politicised and come on the back of the advances made by the Syrian Army against the terrorists.

As for the UN Commission, we were the first to request a UN investigation when terrorists launched rockets that carried toxic gas in the outskirts of Aleppo. Several months before the attack, American and Western statements were already preparing public opinion of the potential use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government.

This raised our suspicion that they were aware of the terrorists' intentions to use these weapons in order to blame the Syrian government. After liaising with Russia, we decided to request a commission to investigate the incident. Whereas we requested an investigation based on the facts on the ground, not on rumours or allegations; the US, France and the UK have tried to exploit the incident to investigate allegations rather than happenings.

During the last few weeks, we have worked with the Commission and set the guidelines for cooperation. First of these, is that our national sovereignty is a red line and as such the Commission will directly liaise with us during the process. Second, the issue is not only how the investigation will be conducted but also how the results will be interpreted. We are all aware that instead of being interpreted in an objective manner, these results could easily be interpreted according to the requirements and agendas of certain major countries. Certainly, we expect Russia to block any interpretation that aims to serve American and western policies. What is most important is that we differentiate between western accusations that are based on allegations and hearsay and our request for an investigation based on concrete evidence and facts.

Q7 Interviewer: Recent statements by the American administration and other Western governments have stated that the US has not ruled out military intervention in Syria. In light of this, is it looking more likely that the US would behave in the same way it did in Iraq, in other words look for a pretext for military intervention?

President al-Assad: This is not the first time that the possibility of military intervention has been raised. From the outset, the US, along with France and Britain, has strived for military intervention in Syria. Unfortunately for them, events took a different course with the balance shifting against their interests in the Security Council despite their numerous attempts to haggle with Russia and China, but to no avail. The negative outcomes that emerged in Libya and Egypt were also not in their favour.

All of this made it impossible for them to convince their constituents and the world that they were following sound or successful policies.

The situation in Libya also differs to that of Egypt and Tunisia, and Syria as I have said is very different from all these. Each country has a unique situation and applying the same scenario across the board is no longer a plausible option. No doubt they can wage wars, but they cannot predict where they will spread or how they will end. This has led them to realise that all their crafted scenarios have now spiralled out of their control.

It is now crystal clear to everybody that what is happening in Syria is not a popular revolution pushing for political reform, but targeted terrorism aimed at destroying the Syrian state. What will they say to their people when pushing for military intervention: we are intervening in Syria to support terrorism against the state?!

Interviewer: What will America face should it decide on military intervention or on waging a war on Syria?

Global powers can wage wars, but can they win them?

President al-Assad: What it has been confronted with in every war since Vietnam... failure. America has waged many wars, but has never been able to achieve its political objectives from any of them. It will also not be able to convince the American people of the benefits of this war, nor will it be able to convince the people in this region of their policies and plans. Global powers can wage wars, but

can they win them?

Q8: Interviewer: Mr. President, how is your relationship with President Vladimir Putin? Do you speak on the phone? If so, what do you discuss?

President al-Assad: I have a strong relationship with President Putin, which spans back many years even before the crisis. We contact each other from time to time, although the complexity of events in Syria cannot be discussed on the phone. Our relationship is facilitated through Russian and Syrian officials who exchange visits, the majority of which are conducted away from the glare of the media.

current priorities are to work towards easing the violence in Syria

Q9 Interviewer: Mr. President, are you planning to visit Russia or invite President Putin to visit Syria?

President al-Assad: It is possible of course; however the current priorities are to work towards easing the violence in Syria, there are casualties on a daily basis. When circumstances improve, a visit will be necessary; for now, our officials are managing this relationship well.

Q10: Interviewer: Mr. President, Russia is opposing the US and EU policies, especially with regards to Syria, what would happen were Russia to make a compromise now? Is such a scenario possible?

President al-Assad: Russian-American relations should not be viewed through the context of the Syrian crisis alone; it should be viewed in a broader and more comprehensive manner. The US presumed that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was perpetually destroyed. After President Putin took office in the late 90s, Russia began to gradually recover and regain its international position; hence the Cold War began again, but in a different and subtler manner.

The US persisted on many fronts: striving to contain Russian interests in the world, attempting to influence the mentality of Russians closer to the West both in terms of culture and aspiration. It worked diligently to eliminate Russia's vital and powerful role on many fronts, one of which is Syria.

You may be wondering, like many Russians, why Russia continues to stand by Syria. It is important to explain this reason to the general public: Russia is not defending President Bashar al-Assad or the Syrian government, since the Syrian people should decide their president and the most suitable political system - this is not the issue. Russia is defending the fundamental principles it has embraced for more than a hundred years, the first of which is independence and the policy of non-interference in internal affairs. Russia itself has suffered and continues to suffer from such interference.

Additionally, Russia is defending its legitimate interests in the region. Some superficial analysts narrow these interests to the Port of Tartous, but in reality Russia's interests are far more significant. Politically speaking, when terrorism strikes Syria, a key country in the region, it would have a direct impact on stability in the Middle East, which would subsequently affect Russia. Unlike many western governments, the Russian leadership fully understands this reality. From a social and cultural perspective, we must not forget the tens of thousands of Syrian-Russian families, which create a social, cultural and humanitarian bridge between our two countries.

If Russia were to seek a compromise, as you stipulated, this would have happened one or two years ago when the picture was blurred, even for some Russian officials. Today, the picture is crystal clear. A Russia that didn't make a compromise back then, would not do so now.



Q11 Interviewer: Mr. President, are there any negotiations with Russia to supply fuel or military hardware to Syria? With regards to the S-300 defence system contract in particular, have you received it?

contracts signed with Russia are being honoured and neither the crisis nor the pressure from the US, European or Gulf countries' have affected their implementation

President al-Assad: Of course, no country would publically declare what armaments and weapons it possesses, or the contracts it signs in this respect. This is strictly classified information concerning the Armed Forces. Suffice to say that all contracts signed with Russia are being honoured and neither the crisis nor the pressure from the US, European or Gulf countries' have affected their implementation. Russia continues to supply Syria with what it requires to defend itself and its people.

Q12 Interviewer: Mr President, what form of aid does Syria require from Russia today? Is it financial or perhaps military equipment? For example would Syria request a loan from Russia?

President al-Assad: In the absence of security on the ground, it is impossible to have a functioning and stable economy. So firstly, the support that Russia is providing through agreed military contracts to help Syrians defend themselves will lead to better security, which will in turn help facilitate an economic recovery. Secondly, Russia's political support for our right of independence and sovereignty has also played a significant role. Many other countries have turned against us politically and translated this policy by cutting economic ties and closing their markets. Russia has done the complete opposite and continues to maintain good trading relations with us, which has helped keep our economy functioning. Therefore in response to your question, Russia's supportive political stance and its commitment to honour the agreed military contracts without surrendering to American pressure have substantially aided our economy, despite the negative bearings the economic embargo - imposed by others, has had on the lives of the Syrian people.

From a purely economic perspective, there are several agreements between Syria and Russia for various goods and materials. As for a loan from Russia, this should be viewed as beneficial to both parties: for Russia it is an opportunity for its national industries and companies to expand into new markets, for Syria it provides some of the funding necessary to rebuild our infrastructure and stimulate our economy. I reiterate that Russia's political stance and support have been instrumental in restoring security and providing the basic needs for the Syrian people.

Q13 Interviewer: Mr. President, do these contracts relate to fuel or basic food requirements?

President al-Assad: Syrian citizens are being targeted through their basic food, medical and fuel requirements. The Syrian government is working to ensure these basic needs are available to all Syrians through trade agreements with Russia and other friendly countries.

Q14 Interviewer: Returning to the situation in Syria and the current crisis. We are aware that you successively issue amnesties. Do these amnesties include rebels? And do some of them subsequently change sides to fight with the Armed Forces?

certain groups have switched from fighting against the army to fighting beside it

President al-Assad: Yes, this is in fact the case. Recently, there has been a marked shift, especially since the picture has become clearer to many that what is happening in Syria is sheer terrorism. Many have come back into the mainstream of civil life, surrendering their weapons and benefitting from the amnesties to help them return to their normal lives. Most remarkably, there are certain

groups who have switched from fighting against the army to fighting beside it; these people were either misled by what was propagated in the media or were initially militarised under threats from the terrorists. It is for this very reason that from the start of the crisis, the Syrian government has adopted an open door policy to all those who wanted to U-turn on the initial route they took against their country. Despite the fact that many people in Syria were opposed to this policy, it has proven to be effective and has helped alleviate some of the tension from the crisis.

Q15 Interviewer: Mr. President, Syria's relations with several states are collapsing consecutively, such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Who are your true allies, and who are your enemies?

President al-Assad: The countries that support us are well known to everyone: internationally - Russia and China, regionally - Iran. However, we are starting to see a positive shift on the international arena. Certain countries that were strongly against Syria have begun to change their positions; others have started to reinstate relations with us. Of course, the changes in these countries' positions do not constitute direct support.

In contrast, there are particular countries that have directly mobilised and buttressed terrorism in Syria. Predominantly Qatar and Turkey in the first two years; Qatar financed while Turkey provided logistical support by training terrorists and streaming them into Syria. Recently, Saudi Arabia has replaced Qatar in the funding role. To be completely clear and transparent, Saudi Arabia has nothing but funding; those who only have money cannot build a civilisation or nurture it. Saudi Arabia implements its agenda depending on how much money it commands.

Turkey is a different case. It is pitiful that a great country such as Turkey, which bears a strategic location and a liberal society, is being manipulated by a meagre amount of dollars through a Gulf state harbouring a regressive mentality. It is of course the Turkish Prime Minister who shoulders responsibility for this situation and not the Turkish people with whom we share a great deal of heritage and traditions.

Q17 Interviewer: Mr. President, what makes Russian-Syrian relations so strong? Is it geopolitical interests? Or that they jointly share a struggle against terrorism?

President al-Assad: There is more than one factor that forges Syrian-Russian relations so strongly. First of which is that Russia has suffered from occupation during World War II and Syria has been occupied more than once. Secondly, since the Soviet era, Russia has been subjected to continuous and repeated attempts of foreign intervention in its internal affairs; this is also the case with Syria.

Thirdly but no less significantly is terrorism. In Syria, we understand well what it means when extremists from Chechnya kill innocent civilians, what it means to hold under siege children and teachers in Beslan or hold innocent people hostage in Moscow's theatre. Equally, the Russian people understand when we in Syria refer to the identical acts of terrorism they have suffered. It is for this reason that the Russian people reject the Western narrative of "good terrorists and bad terrorists."

In addition to these areas, there are also the Syrian-Russian family ties I mentioned earlier, which would not have developed without common cultural, social and intellectual characteristics, as well as the geopolitical interests we also spoke of. Russia, unlike the Europeans and the West, is well aware of the consequences of destabilising Syria and the region and the affect this will have on the inexorable spread of terrorism.

All of these factors collectively shape the political stance of a great country like Russia. Its position is not founded on one or two elements, but rather by a comprehensive historical, cultural and

intellectual perspective.

Q18 Interviewer: Mr. President, what will occur in Geneva 2, what are your expectations from this conference?

President al-Assad: The objective of the Geneva conference is to support the political process and facilitate a political solution to the crisis. However, this cannot be accomplished before halting the foreign support to terrorism. We expect that the Geneva conference would start applying pressure on the countries supporting terrorism in Syria, to stop the smuggling of weapons and the streaming of foreign terrorists into the country. When this is achieved, political steps can be easily pursued, most imperative of which is initiating a dialogue between Syrians to discuss the future political system, the constitution, various legislations and others.

Interviewer: Thank you for your sincerity and for such a transparent discussion during this interview.

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