

Rep. Tulsi Gabbard's Secret Trip to Syria: "Our counterproductive regime change war does not serve America's interest"

'I Wanted to Get a First-Hand Look of the Situation'

By [Hawaii News Now](#)

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U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard met with Syrian President Bashar Assad during a recent unannounced trip to the war-torn country.

"Originally, I had no intention of meeting with Assad," she said, in a news release. "But when given the opportunity, I felt it was important to take it. I think we should be ready to meet with anyone if there's a chance it can help bring about an end to this war, which is causing the Syrian people so much suffering."

Gabbard told CNN's Jake Tapper on "The Lead" that not dealing with Assad isn't in anyone's best interests.

"Bashar al-Assad is responsible for thousands of deaths and millions of people being displaced during this five-year-long civil war," Tapper told Gabbard on Wednesday. "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?"

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

In a phone interview on Hawaii News Now Sunrise, she explained her reasoning for her trip, saying **the suffering of the Syrian people** had been

"weighing very heavily on my heart for so long, and I wanted to see if there was some very small way that I could try to express the care, the love and the aloha the people of Hawaii and the people of our country have for the Syrian people. I wanted to get a first-hand look of the situation on the ground there."

Gabbard surprised many by traveling to the region, and she said she did not inform the outgoing or current presidential administration.

"I went on this trip as a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee as well as the House Armed Services Committee, both of which yield to shaping policy on the issue of Syria on the issue of our fight against groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda. And it speaks directly to the

bill that I introduced: The Stop Arming Terrorists bill,” she said.

Political analyst Colin Moore said her sit-down with Assad runs the risk of legitimizing the Syrian president.

“I don’t think it does much to help U.S. foreign policy to have an independent member of Congress to essentially go rogue in this case,” he said.

Gabbard’s visit came two months after she sat down with President-elect Donald Trump to discuss foreign policy.

The Hawaii representative has frequently challenged Barack Obama on national security issues, and in her meeting with Trump, warned him about escalating the civil war in Syria by establishing a no-fly zone to protect civilians from bombing.

In a news release Wednesday, Gabbard said that in addition to Assad, she met with a long list of people, including opposition leaders and refugees.

“My visit to Syria has made it abundantly clear: Our counterproductive regime change war does not serve America’s interest, and it certainly isn’t in the interest of the Syrian people,” Gabbard said.

I return to Washington, DC with even greater resolve to end our illegal war to overthrow the Syrian government. I call upon Congress and the new administration to answer the pleas of the Syrian people immediately and support the Stop Arming Terrorists Act. We must end our war to overthrow the Syrian government and focus our attention on defeating al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Gabbard’s spokeswoman, Emily Latimer, previously declined to say whether Gabbard had met with Assad during her Syria trip.

She said Gabbard, who is a major in the Army National Guard, “has long been committed to peace and ending counterproductive, interventionist wars.”

“As a member of the Armed Services and Foreign Affairs Committees, and as an individual committed to doing all she can to promote and work for peace, she felt it was important to meet with a number of individuals and groups including religious leaders, humanitarian workers, refugees and government and community leaders,” Latimer said in a statement.

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