

# President Al-Assad: “Foreign Troops Coming to Syria without Permission Are Invaders”

Interview with to Chinese Phoenix TV

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*Damascus, SANA-President Bashar al-Assad said that the solution to the crisis in Syria should be through two parallel ways: the first one is to fight the terrorists, and this is our duty as government, to defend the Syrians and use any means in order to destroy the terrorists who've been killing and destroying in Syria, and the second one is to make dialogue.*

The president added in an interview given to Chinese PHOENIX TV that any foreign troops coming to Syria without our invitation or consultation or permission, they are invaders, whether they are American, Turkish, or any other one.

Flowing is the full text of the interview:

Question 1: Thank you Mr. President for having us here in Dimashq, the capital of Syria. I think this is the first interview you have with Chinese media after the national ceasefire and after so many fresh rounds of talks, both in Astana and in Geneva, and of course after US President Donald Trump's inauguration, and these days, as we have seen, your troops are making steady progress in battlefields, but peace talks do not seem just as productive. So, as far as the Geneva talks is concerned, your chief negotiator, Mr. Jaafari, was trying hard to find out who should be sitting on the other side of the negotiation table. So, according to your idea, who should be sitting there?



President Assad: This is a very crucial question. If you want those negotiations to be fruitful, we have to ask “who is going to be sitting there?” I mean, there could be a lot of good people with good intentions, but the question is: who do they represent? That's the question. In this situation, you have different groups, you have people who are, let's say, patriotic, but they don't represent anyone, they represent themselves. You have others who represent the terrorists, and you have terrorists on the table, and you have others who

represent the agenda of foreign countries like Saudi Arabia, like Turkey, like France, UK and maybe the United States. So, it's not a homogeneous meeting. If you want it to be fruitful, going back to the first point that I mentioned, it should be a real Syrian-Syrian negotiations. In spite of that, we went to that meeting because we think any kind of dialogue could be a good step toward the solution, because even those people who are terrorists or belonging to the terrorists or to other countries, they may change their mind and go back to their normality by going back to being real Syrians, detach themselves from being terrorists or agents to other groups. That's why I say we didn't expect Geneva to produce anything, but it's a step, and it's going to be a long way, and you may have other rounds, whether in Geneva or in Astana.

Question 2: But anyway, it is an intra-Syrian talks, right? But the matter of fact is, it is proxy dialogue. I mean, main parties do not meet and have dialogue directly.

President Assad: Exactly.

Journalist: Are you personally satisfied with the current negotiation format or mechanism?

President Assad: we didn't forge this mechanism; it was forged by de Mistura and the UN with the influence of the countries that wanted to use those negotiations in order to make pressure on Syria, not to reach any resolution. As you just said, each one represents a different agenda, even the opposition delegations, it wasn't one delegation; different delegations of the opposition. So, if I'm going to – as a government – if I'm going to negotiate with someone, who's it going to be? Which one? Who represents who? That's our question. So, you are right, this time there was no negotiations in Geneva, but this is one of the reasons, that's why it didn't reach anything. The only thing we discussed in Geneva was the agenda, the headlines, what are we going to discuss later, that's it.

Question 3: But as we see, lot of time, money, energy have been put into this effort, and the clashes are still going on, people are still dying, and the refugees are still increasing.

President Assad: Exactly.

Journalist: What is the possible way of having a negotiation?

President Assad: Again, you are correct. The more delay you have, the more harm and destruction and killing and blood you'll have within Syria, that's why we are very eager to achieve a solution, but how and in which way? You need to have two parallel ways: the first one is to fight the terrorists, and this is our duty as government, to defend the Syrians and use any means in order to destroy the terrorists who've been killing and destroying in Syria. The second one is to make dialogue. This dialogue has many different aspects; you have the political one, which is related to the future of Syria; what political system do you need, what kind? It doesn't matter which one, it depends on the Syrians, and they're going to have referendum about what they want. The second part is to try to bring many of those people who were affiliated to the terrorists or who committed any terrorist acts to go back to their normality and lay down their armaments and to live normal life in return for amnesty that has been offered by the government, and we've been going in that direction for three years, and it worked very well. It worked very well. So, actually, if you want to talk about the real political solution since the beginning of the crisis, of the war on Syria, till this moment, the only solution was those reconciliations between the government and the different militants

in Syria, many of them joined the government now, and they are fighting with the government. Some of them laid down their.



Question 4: But talking about the Syria war, you can never exclude the foreign factors. The Saudi-backed high negotiating committee, HNC, are saying that they are counting on the Trump administration to play a positive role instead of the mistaken policies under his predecessor Barack Obama. So, from your side, what do you expect from Trump's Middle East policy, particularly policy on Syria?

President Assad: The first part that you mentioned about their hopes, when you pin your hopes on a foreign country, doesn't matter which foreign country, it means you're not patriotic, and this is proved, because they should depend on the support of the Syrian people, not any other government or administration.

Now, regarding the Trump administration, during his campaign and after the campaign, the main rhetoric of the Trump administration and the president himself was about the priority of defeating ISIS. I said since the beginning that this is a promising approach to what's happening in Syria and in Iraq, because we live in the same area and we face the same enemy. We haven't seen anything concrete yet regarding this rhetoric, because we've been seeing now certain is a local kind of raids. You cannot deal with terrorism on local basis; it should be comprehensive, it cannot be partial or temporary. It cannot be from the air, it should be in cooperation with the troops on the ground, that's why the Russians succeeded, since they supported the Syrian Army in pushing ISIS to shrink, not to expand as it used to be before that. So, we have hopes that this taking into consideration that talking about ISIS doesn't mean talking about the whole terrorism; ISIS is one of the products, al-Nusra is another product, you have so many groups in Syria, they are not ISIS, but they are Al Qaeda, they have the same background of the Wahabi extremist ideology.

Question 5: So, Mr. President, you and Mr. Donald Trump actually share the same priority which is counter-terrorism, and both of you hate fake news. Do you see any room for cooperation?

President Assad: Yeah, in theory, yes, but practically, not yet, because there's no link between Syria and the United States on the formal level. Even their raids against ISIS that I just mentioned, which are only a few raids, happened without the cooperation or the

consultation with the Syrian Army or the Syrian government which is illegal as we always say. So, theoretically we share those goals, but particularly, not yet.

Question 6: Do you have personal contact with the President of the United States?

President Assad: Not at all.

Journalist: Direct or indirect.

President Assad: Indirect, you have so many channels, but you cannot bet on private channels. It should be formal, this is where you can talk about a real relation with another government.

Question 7: As we speak, top generals from Turkey, Russia, and the United States are meeting somewhere in Turkey to discuss tensions in northern Syria, where mutually-suspicious forces are allied with these countries. So, do you have a plan for a final attack on Daesh when the main players actually do need an effective coordination in order to clear Syria of all terror groups?

President Assad: Yeah, if you want to link that meeting with ISIS in particular, it won't be objective, because at least one party, which is Turkey, has been supporting ISIS till this moment, because Erdogan, the Turkish President, is Muslim Brotherhood. He's ideologically linked and sympathetic with ISIS and with al-Nusra, and everybody knows about this in our region, and he helped them either through armaments, logistically, through exporting oil. For the other party, which is the United States, at least during Obama's administration, they dealt with ISIS by overlooking their smuggling the Syrian oil to Turkey, and this is how they can get money in order to recruit terrorists from around the world, and they didn't try to do anything more than cosmetic against ISIS. The only serious party in that regard is Russia, which is effectively attacking ISIS in cooperation with us. So, the question is: how can they cooperate, and I think the Russians have hope that the two parties join the Russians and the Syrians in their fight against terrorism. So, we have more hopes now regarding the American party because of the new administration, while in Turkey nothing has changed in that regard. ISIS in the north have only one route of supply, it's through Turkey, and they're still alive and they're still active and they're still resisting different kinds of waves of attacks, because of the Turkish support.

Question 8: Now, US troops are in Manbej. Is the greenlight from your side? Did you open the door for these American troops?



President Assad: No, no, we didn't. Any foreign troops coming to Syria without our invitation or consultation or permission, they are invaders, whether they are American, Turkish, or any other one. And we don't think this is going to help. What are they going to do? To fight ISIS?

The Americans lost nearly every war. They lost in Iraq, they had to withdraw at the end. Even in Somalia, let alone Vietnam in the past and Afghanistan, your neighboring country. They didn't succeed anywhere they sent troops, they only create a mess; they are very good in creating problems and destroying, but they are very bad in finding solutions.

Question 9: Talking about Russia and China, they just vetoed a new UN sanction on Syria last week. What do these Chinese vetoes mean exactly for your country?

President Assad: Let's be very clear about their position, which is not to support the Syrian government or the Syrian president, because in the West they try to portray it as a personal problem, and as Russia and China and other countries and Iran support that person as president. It's not the case. China is a member of the Security Council, and it's committed to the Charter of the United Nations. In that veto, China has defended first of all the Charter, because the United Nations was created in order to restore stability around the world. Actually, the Western countries, especially the permanent members of the Council as a tool or means in order to change regimes or governments and to implement their agenda, not to restore stability, and actually to create more instability around the world. So the second part is that China restored stability in the world by creating some kind of political balance within the United Nations, of course in cooperation with Russia, which is very important for the whole world. Of course, Syria was the headline, the main headline, this is good for Syria, but again it's good for the rest of the world. Third, the same countries that wanted to use the UN Charter for their own vested interests are the same countries who interfered or tried to intervene in your country in the late 90s, and they used different headlines, human rights, and so on, and you know that, and if they had the chance, they would change every government in the world, whether big country or small country, just when this government tries to be a little bit independent. So, China protected the Chinese interests, Syrian interests, and the world interests, especially the small countries or the weak countries.

Question 10: If I'm not mistaken, you said China is going to play a role in the reconstruction of Syria. So, in which areas you think China can contribute to bring Syrian people back to their normal life after so many years of hardships?

President Assad: Actually, if you talk about what the terrorists have been doing the last six years, it's destroying everything regarding the infrastructure. In spite of that, the Syrian government is still effective, at least by providing the minimum needs for the Syrian people. But they've been destroying everything in every sector with no exception. Adding to that, the Western embargo in Syria has prevented Syria from having even the basic needs for the livelihood of any citizen in Syria. So, in which sector? In every sector. I mean, China can be in every sector with no exception, because we have damage in every sector. But if we talk about now, before this comprehensive reconstruction starts, China now is being involved directly in building many projects, mainly industrial projects, in Syria, and we have many Chinese experts now working in Syria in different projects in order to set up those projects. But of course, when you have more stability, the most important thing is building the destroyed suburbs. This is the most important part of the reconstruction. The second one is the infrastructure; the sanitation system, the electricity, the oil fields, everything, with no exception. The third one: the industrial projects, which could belong to the private sector or the public sector in Syria.

Question 11: Alright. And it seems no secret that there are some Chinese extremists are here, fighting alongside Daesh. I think it is a threat to both Syria and China. What concrete or effective measures do you have to control border and prevent these extremists from free



movement in the region?

President Assad: When you talk about extremists or terrorists, it doesn't matter what their nationality is, because they don't recognize borders, and they don't belong to a country. The only difference between nationality and nationality, is that those for example who came from your country, they know your country more than the others, so they can do more harm in your country than others, and the same for Syrians, the same for Russian terrorist, and so on. So now, the measures, every terrorist should be defeated and demolished, unless he changed his position to the normal life. Second, because you're talking about different nationalities -more than 80 nationalities - you should have cooperation with the other governments, especially in the intelligence field, and that's what's happening for example with the Chinese intelligence regarding the Uyghur terrorists who are coming from China through Turkey. Unfortunately, the only means that we don't have now and we don't control is our borders with Turkey, because the Uyghur in Particular, they came from Turkey, the others coming maybe from Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, from the sea, maybe, and the majority from Turkey, but the Uyghur terrorists coming mainly from Turkey. Why? I don't know why, but they have the support of the Turkish government, and they were gathered and collected in one group, and they were sent to the northern part of Syria. So, the mission now is to attack them, wherever they existed. Of course, sometimes you cannot tell which one... who is who, they mix with each other, but sometimes they work as separate groups from different nationalities. And this is very crucial kind of cooperation between the Syrian and the Chinese intelligence, and we did many good steps in that regard.

Question 12: Mr. President, as you may be fully aware that the "White Helmets" took an Oscar this year for the best documentary short, but folks are saying that the truth about this "White Helmets" is not like what Netflix has presented, so what is your take on this?

President Assad: First of all, we have to congratulate al-Nusra for having the first Oscar! This is an unprecedented event for the West to give Al Qaeda an Oscar; this is unbelievable, and this is another proof that the Oscars, Nobel, all these things are politicized certificates, that's how I can look at it. The White Helmets story is very simple; it is a facelift of al-Nusra Front in Syria, just to change their ugly face into a more humanitarian face, that's it. And you have many videos on the net and of course images broadcasted by the White Helmets that condemn the White Helmets as a terrorists group, where you can see the same person wearing the white helmet and celebrating over the dead bodies of Syrian soldiers. So, that's what the Oscar went to, to those terrorists. So, it's a story just to try to prevent the Syrian Army during the liberation of Aleppo from making more pressure on the attacking and liberating the districts within the city that have been occupied by those terrorists, to say that the Syrian Army and the Russians are attacking the civilians and the innocents and the humanitarian people.

Question 13: Right. Now Palmyra. I took a one-day trip to Palmyra this time. Now, the city is under your control, so as its strategic position is concerned, because Homs is the heart of Syria, it's right in the middle, now, when you have Palmyra, what is your next target? Are you going to expand a military operation into Raqqa and Dier Ezzor?

President Assad: We are very close to Raqqa now. Yesterday, our troops reached the Euphrates River which is very close to Raqqa city, and Raqqa is the stronghold of ISIS today, so it's going to be a priority for us, but that doesn't mean the other cities are not priority, in time that could be in parallel, because Palmyra is on the way to Dier Ezzor city in the eastern part of Syria which is close to the Iraqi borders, and those areas that have been

used by ISIS as route for logistic support between ISIS in Iraq and ISIS in

Syria. So, whether you attack the stronghold or you attack the route that ISIS uses, it has the same result.

Question 14: How many days do you think this war is going to last?

President Assad: if we presume that you don't have foreign intervention, it will take a few months. It's not very complicated internally. The complexity of this war is the foreign intervention. This is the problem. So, in the face of that intervention, the good thing that we gained during the war is the unity of the society. At the very beginning, the vision for many Syrians wasn't very clear about what's happening. Many believed the propaganda of the West about the reality, about the real story, that this is against the oppression. If it's against the oppression, why the people in Saudi Arabia didn't revolt, for example? So, now what we gained is this, this is our strongest foundation to end that war. We always have hope that this year is going to be the last year. But at the end, this is war and you can't expect what is going to happen precisely.



Question 15: Mr. President, you are President of the Syrian Republic, at the same time, you are a loving husband and a father of three. How can you balance the role of being a President, a father, and a husband?

President Assad: If you cannot succeed in your small duty which is your family, you cannot succeed in your bigger duty or more comprehensive duty at the level of a country. So, there is no excuse that if you have a lot of work to abandon your duties; it's a duty. You have to be very clear about that, you have to fulfill those duties in a very good way. Of course, sometimes those circumstances do not allow you to do whatever you have to do, your duties, fully, let's say.

Journalist: During a day, how much time you spend on work, and how much time you spend with your family members?

President Assad: Actually, it's not about the time, because even if you are at your home, you have to work.

Journalist: Okay.

President Assad: Let's say, in the morning and the evening, you have the chance, but in between and after those times, you have the whole day to work.

Question 16: Have you ever thought of leaving this country for the sake of your family?

President Assad: Never, after six years, I mean the most difficult times passed; it was in 2012 and 2013, those times we never thought about it, how can I think about it now?

So, no, no, this is not an option. Whenever you have any kind of reluctance, you will lose. You will lose not with your enemies; you lose with your supporters. Those supporters, I mean the people you work with, the fighters, the army, they will feel if you're not determined to defend your country. We never had any feeling neither me nor any member of my family.

Question 17: And how is Kareem's Chinese getting along?

President Assad: He learned the basics of Chinese language, I think two years ago. Unfortunately, the lady and the man who taught him had to leave, because they were members of the Chinese Embassy. They went back to China. Now, he stopped improve his Chinese language.

Question 18: Do you think it is a good choice to learn Chinese for him?

President Assad: Of course, of course, because China is a rising power.

Journalist: You didn't force him to learn Chinese? It's his own option, right?

President Assad: No, no, we never thought about it, actually. I didn't think that he has to learn Chinese, and I didn't expect him, if I thought about it, that he would say yes, because for many in the world the Chinese language is a difficult language to learn. He took the initiative and he said I want to learn Chinese, and actually till this moment, I didn't ask him why. I want him to feel free, but when he's getting older, I'm going to ask him how? How did it come through your mind to learn this language, this difficult language, but of course important language.

Journalist: You didn't ask him before? President Assad: No, not yet. Journalist: So, you think it's a good choice?

President Assad: Of course, of course. As I said, it's a rising power, it's important. I mean, most of the world has different kinds of relation with China whether in science, in politics, in economy, in business, I mean, in every filed you need it now. And our relation for the future is going to be on the rise. It was good, but it's going to be on the rise because when a country like China proves that it's a real friend, a friend that you can rely on, it's very natural to have better relation on the popular level, not only on the formal level.

Journalist: Thank you Mr. President, thank you for your time.

President Assad: Thank you for coming to Syria, you're most welcome.

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