

Syria President Al-Assad Interview: We Must Protect our Country against Terrorists “Supported by Regional Powers and the West”

Defeating Terrorism Will Remove Obstacles in Front of Any Political Process.
Czech TV Interview

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President Bashar al-Assad said that terrorists are coming from more than 100 countries around the world to Syria, they want to make Syria a hub for terrorism.

In an interview with the Czech TV, President al-Assad asserted that one cannot fight terrorism while directly supporting the terrorists with armaments and forming alliances with most zealous supporters of terrorism in the world; which is the Saudi Kingdom

The President made it clear that you should do everything to protect your country. You cannot protect your country if you do not protect society and the principles and the values in that society, asserting that a country is not a land and borders, it is people and a way of thinking.

Following is the full text of the interview:

Question 1: Thank you. Let me start by a personal question. You are a doctor. In 2011 you said, and I quote you, that you have chosen eye surgery because it is almost never an emergency and there is very little blood. It was March 2011, the very time when the Syrian war broke out, the bloodiest conflict in the world, one big emergency. How do you take that?

President Assad: If you want to make a relation between this job or any surgery job and what is going on in Syria, it depends on the intention. You always have blood in surgery but you have blood to save the life of the patient not to kill him. While the blood that we have in Syria is to kill the Syrians by terrorists; and our job as the government is to save their lives through destroying the terrorists. This is the only link and I hope I understand you question well.

Reporter: Yes, yes I mean ...

President Assad: So our job is to save life. If you have blood, it is to defend your country. You use your army to defend your country.

Question 2: But 250,000 people, it is unimaginable in any country.

President Assad: This is the result when you have a lot of terrorists supported by regional powers and by the West. It is not only terrorists coming from within Syria, terrorists coming

from more than 100 countries around the world. They wanted to make Syria a hub for terrorism and that is the situation. If we did not defend our country, that number would be many folds.

Question 3: You mentioned terrorism. It seems that in recent days, there have been huge developments in the Syrian crisis. What do you think was the most important date in the Syrian crisis: September 30th and the Russian intervention or November 13th and the Paris terrorist attacks?

President Assad: Now definitely the Russian participation, or what was announced as a front against terrorism, is the most important one. This is the practical thing against terrorism, while in Paris what happened on the political level is just to assuage the feelings of the French, like saying the French are going to attack ISIS in a very different way. What does that mean? Was not France serious before the attack on Paris? So, they are going to only assuage the feelings of the French, nothing serious, while the Russians are very serious in fighting terrorism and there is cooperation between them and the Syrian army.



Question 4: So you think that the increase in attacks by the western coalition or the coalition under the U.S. leadership is not helping?

President Assad: According to the facts, since the beginning of that coalition, if you want to talk about facts not opinions, ISIS has expanded, and their recruits from around the world have increased. While since the participation of the Russians in the same so-called fight against terrorism, ISIS has been shrinking and Al Nusra of course and other terrorist groups. So, this is reality. The facts are telling.

Question 5: Is not that because, militarily speaking, simply the Russian air force could work with the forces of the Syrian army?

President Assad: Because there is cooperation, that is what I said. You cannot kill terrorists or destroy terrorism from the air, you cannot, it is almost impossible, the Americans have been trying this in Afghanistan for how long? More than 12 or 13 years. Did they achieve anything? Nothing. Terrorism is still strong in Afghanistan. So you cannot. You need cooperation from within that country, any power. The major power in Syria is the Syrian army and of course the government.

Question 6: The French president is trying to get together broader coalition against terrorism. Are you skeptical about his effort?

President Assad: Definitely, if they wanted to learn from what had happened recently in Paris, why did not they learn from Charlie Hebdo? The same principle and the same concept. We said at that time that this is only the tip of the iceberg. What is under the water is much

bigger. They did not learn. This is first. Second, you cannot fight terrorism while you are supporting the terrorists directly with armaments and having alliance with most zealous supporters of terrorism in the world; which is the Saudi Kingdom. You cannot. This is contradiction. You cannot be the police and the thief at the same time. You have to choose either way to stand.

Question 7: But I did not hear about any western supplies to the Islamic State?

President Assad: You have them very clearly on the internet. French and other of course different parties but the French example existed. How could a country like France sell such weapons to a destination that it does not know, or that they do not know where they will go? That is impossible. They know through the Saudi Kingdom and Qatar and maybe from other countries, definitely.

Question 8: There was an incident on the Turkish borders, the downing of a Russian bomber. Do you think this incident will influence the outcome of this French president's efforts to create a broader coalition? Do you think it will even complicate the peace talks in Syria?

President Assad: I do not think so, but I think it has shown the relentlessness of Erdogan who let us say lost his nerves just because the Russian intervention has changed the balance on the ground. So, the failure of Erdogan in Syria, the failure of his terrorist groups means his political demise, so he wanted to do anything in order to put obstacles in front of any success. So, he did it, but I do not think it will change any balance. The war against terrorism is continuing. The Russian supportive participation is going to be stronger, it is strong anyway, and I think there is no way back on that regard, whether he does it again, this way or another way.

Question 9: The U.S. president says that he does not want to repeat the same mistake; to make a ground invasion without actually knowing who will fill in the vacuum. Most of the presidential candidates in recent elections are saying that they want to do much more than just bombing. What do you think is the more realistic approach that will lead to defeating the Islamic State?

President Assad: Actually, if I want to talk about terrorism in general not only about ISIS. We have to work on more than one axis and find a multi-aspect solution. Part of it is related to ideology and part of it is related to economy, to the political stances and political cooperation; and the last thing is security cooperation and fighting directly. Because of the situation that we are in now, there is no way but to fight them directly. But this is not enough. If you want to fight and defeat them you have to cut and suffocate their supplies, armaments, money and recruits that are coming mainly through Turkey, and with the support of the Saudis and Qataris, this is the first step you take while you are attacking them on the ground. The problem now is that we are fighting the terrorists but they have unlimited supplies, unwarranted supplies from different countries, mainly regional countries, with the support or overlooking of the West, some of the western countries to be precise.

Question 10: You said that your priority is to fight and defeat terrorists before the political solution. What do you mean by defeating terrorism? That there will not be no armed opposition groups left in Syria?

Defeating terrorism is removing obstacles from the way of any political process

President Assad: You cannot talk about opposition in the political sense while they are holding arms. You know, in your country when you talk about opposition, it is only political movement. Second, if it is political, it should have grass roots. So, when we talk about rebels or militants who are holding guns and any other armaments to attack people, to attack the Syrian people or to attack the Syrian army and to destroy any public or private properties and so on, this is terrorism. There is no other definition. So, we do not accept the term of militant opposition or military opposition or moderate opposition having armaments. This is not opposition, this is terrorism. Opposition for us is a political movement outside or inside Syria. That does not matter. Of course, the other aspect of the opposition is to be patriotic not an opposition that was formed in France, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the USA or the UK. It should be Syrian formed in Syria. And we have Syrian opposition. We have real Syrian opposition.

How big or how strong, this is not an issue. So, defeating terrorism is removing obstacles from the way of any political process. Now, if you agree upon any steps or procedures with any opposition in the world, the Syrian opposition I mean, what can you achieve? Can you make real elections? Can you bring stability of the opposition? The terrorists have their own world, they have their own goals. They have their own agenda and ideology. It is completely different from the political part. So if you start with the political process, you have to start it, I did not say we do not start it. I said if you want to make concrete steps, it should be after we start defeating terrorism. I did not say after we defeat it, because the defeat is a long process.

Question 11: I see a major problem over here. In Vienna, there have been talks about moderate opposition, even including the armed groups. You are saying no talks with anybody who hold weapons?

President Assad: No, the political process has two aspects: one of them is to deal with the political opposition, the other aspect is to deal with those groups. We in Syria call that reconciliation process, when they give up arms and go back to their normal life, the government offers them amnesty.

Reporter: On your terms?

President Assad: No, it is amnesty if you go back to your normal life, amnesty is full amnesty, you are not charged with any conviction, you are free to live your normal life, peaceful life, do not fight and do not hold machineguns, do not terrorize people. This reconciliation has succeeded in Syria. Actually, it has achieved more than any political process. So we do not say we do not deal with those terrorists because if they change their position of course you have to deal with them, but when you talk about the ISIS and Al Nusra and Al Qaeda offshoots, they are not ready to give up their arms, they are not ready to make negotiations with the government anyway. They do not accept and of course we do not accept, their ideology is against the government and against the whole country. They do not recognize borders; they do not recognize the others who are not like them. So, it is difficult and impossible to do any reconciliation with them; but I'm talking about the other groups who terrorize for money, or maybe for fear, for any other reason, we succeeded in making negotiations with them.

Question 12: So in Vienna talks actually we are mentioning the talks between the government and the opposition groups within maybe one month maybe by the end of the

year?

President Assad: Since the beginning of this crisis we said we are ready to make negotiation with anyone, so whether these groups we know that are related to the French not to the Syrians and so on we deal with them as opposition that represents that country, because the Syrians know the reality. So we are not against any kind of cooperation or dialogue or negotiations, dialogue is the most precise one, but at the end, if you make an agreement with those opposition that do not have grass roots in Syria, what will you achieve? That is a simple question. We can make negotiations for months, then at the end who is going to implement if they have no influence on the terrorists, do not have grass roots and do not influence the Syrians? What is the meaning of that meeting? In principle we do not say no, we say yes, but in reality we cannot tell people that this is the hope that we have and this is how we will solve the problem.

Question 13: How do you describe this conflict? Is it like government against freedom fighters? Is it Shiite against Sunnis? Is it Arab against Persia? Is it clash of superpowers? Is it like a fight between a secular state and religious fanatics? What is it?



President Assad: It has every factor that you mentioned but not all of them are real. I mean that if you want to talk about the real feeling of the Syrians, for example, if you take the sectarian factor that you mentioned, it is not true, because if you go now anywhere in Syria, in the areas under the control of the Syrian government, you will see all the ethnic and sectarian colors of the Syrian society. So, that is not true; otherwise people will not live with each other, so this is not the case, but the sectarian hatred has been aggravated because of the Saudis and Qataris; and you always have those fanatics that listen to that kind of rhetoric; but it is not reality. Actually, it is government against rebels who have been supported by different regional and international powers that have nearly the same agenda, maybe different incentive but the same agenda. They want to change the government, to topple the government and the state in Syria and change the president and that government and the whole political system without going back to the Syrian people.

This is the real fight, so when you talk about rebels, they do not have any agenda; and we had negotiations with them. They do not have any political requirement or request, they only like money, they are like mercenary. Most of them wanted to fulfill the agenda of other sides. So, this is the real fight. In appearance, Russia supported the government because they support the international law and the stability in the region, their stability and the stability of the whole region and world. The US always looks for the hegemony over the world because Syria is independent and they do not accept a country that says no to them. But in reality, it is the government with the support of the majority of the Syrian people against those mercenaries supported by those countries.

Question 14: On more personal level, there have been really interesting evolution of you public perception, especially in the West, from being the hope for your country to be one of the world's chief villains, now becoming again a part of the equation existing in Syria. How did you live through all this evolution?

President Assad: Who's evolution?

Reporter: Evolution from being the hope for your country to be the ...

President Assad: You mean before the crisis?

Reporter: Yes, I mean that now everybody is counting on you again for the future of Syria.

President Assad: If you are talking about the relation with the West. In 2005, I was the killer, in 2008, I was peacemaker, then in 2011, I became the butcher. Now there is some positive change, of course shy kind of change not an explicit one.

Question 15: How did you take it personally, how did you live through that?

President Assad: Personally, it has no influence for one reason, because nobody is taking western official seriously anymore for many reasons. First of all, they do not have credibility. Secondly, they do not have vision; they are so shallow. Third, they are not independent. They follow what the Americans order. So they are not serious; they do not exist on the path now, most of the Europeans. We look at the master, and the master is the USA. So, personally it has no influence. For me, especially when you are in a state of war, what to care about is what the Syrian people want and the way the Syrian people look at you. This is very important for me. I do not care about the others. So, if we talk about the fluctuation of this behavior, the European behavior, towards Syria or towards me personally, this is up and down but I have not changed. I stayed the same one since I became president in 2000. So, you have to ask them why they are fluctuating, not me.

Question 16: So, the message to the West is there was no discriminate killing of the civilians in the beginning of the Syrian war, there was no massive torturing of opponents of the regime?

President Assad: Let us presume that this is correct, according to their propaganda, how could you have public support and stay in your position for five years when you have the strongest country in the world against you, while you have the richest countries in the world against you, and your population that you are killing against you? How can you stand here? That is unrealistic. You should have support. How could you have the support of your people while you are killing them? Can you explain, no. So, that is not true, if you want to talk about the causalities, any war is a bad war, there is no good war, even if it is for a good cause, it is bad war; and you have to avoid it. But when you cannot, war is about killing; armament is about killing. You always have causalities and you always have innocents in any war throughout history, while to have the intention, how do you kill them when you want their support.

Question 17: What do you feel when you see the pictures of hundreds of thousands of your fellow Syrians fleeing to Europe?

President Assad: The feeling is very sad, especially if you think that every person of those Syrians who left Syria has a sad story behind him. It reflects the hardship of Syria during the

crisis. From let us say rational way of looking at this situation, it is a lost, everyone of those is a human resource that left Syria, so this will undermine the society in your country definitely, but in the end we have to deal with the reasons. The question that I think every European should ask is why did they leave? For many reasons: the first one is the terrorists that have been attacking them everywhere, either directly or through attacking the basic requirements of living in our country; infrastructure, their way of life, different basic needs and so on, the second one is the European embargo, the European embargo played into the hands of terrorists directly and what was supposed to be with the Syrians became against the Syrians because every embargo is against the population of any country. Many people left Syria because they cannot live here anymore, because they do not have the basic needs of living, so they had to leave to Europe or to Turkey or any other country.

Reporter: They say that you failed them as their leader.

President Assad: I didn't fail them, I did not destroy their infrastructure, I did not give the arms to terrorists to kill and to destroy. The question is: who did that? The Europeans and the Saudis and the Qataris.

Question 18: What should Europe do now? Like should Europeans fear those people or help them?

President Assad: That depends. First of all, big or large part of them are not Syrians. About the Syrians it is a mixture, the majority let us say are good Syrians, the patriotic, the natural people, but of course you have infiltration of terrorists among them. That is true, how much and how many? We cannot tell, it is difficult to tell, and this is reality, and I think that you have some evidence on the internet, photos, videos that prove that some persons who have been killing people here and beheading sometimes left to Europe as peaceful citizens.

Reporter: But Generally speaking, help or fear?

In our crisis, Europe is exporting extremism to us

President Assad: That depends on how Europe should deal with them, because you are talking not only about terrorism, you are talking about culture, even before the crisis, before this flood of refugees going to your country, the problem in Europe is how to integrate those cultures in your society? And I think Europe has failed, whether it is related to Europe from one aspect to the way they deal with the situation or because the Wahhabi institutions spend their money on screwing the interpretation of the Muslims, I am talking about the Muslims in Europe, and created more problems and extremism in your countries. Actually this region used to export sometimes some extremism to Europe. In our crisis, Europe is exporting extremism to us. So, it depends on how you are going to deal with it and I do not think it is going to be easy to make integration.

Question 19: How do you see yourself in this conflict, you said your enemies are terrorists, fanatics, foreign agents. What is the most precious thing you are trying to protect?

President Assad: In our country?

Reporter: Yes

Secularism in Syria is to have freedom of religions, sects and ethnicities

President Assad: Secularism, because Syria is a melting pot. Of course secularism in Syria is different from the way some in the West, especially in France maybe, understand it to be against religion. Actually, secularism in Syria is to have freedom of religions, sects and ethnicities. Without this, you will not have the Syria that has been known for centuries. So, this is the most important thing that we can try to protect. The second thing is moderation, because of this variety of different factors in this society for centuries, you have moderation. Without moderation you cannot have this melting pot, what the terrorists are working on now is to create a new generation that knows nothing about moderation. They are going to be only killers, extremists, fanatics who do not accept the others, in a few years time this is going to be real danger, how can we deal with the new generation? It is not someone who is twenty or above, it is maybe twenty and below. This is the real challenge that we are going to face.

Question 20: Is there anything that you would not do to protect those values you mentioned?

You should do everything to protect your country

President Assad: No, you should do everything to protect your country. You cannot protect your country if you do not protect society and the principles and the values in that society. A country is not a land and borders, it is people and a way of thinking.

Question 21: If you had the chance to change one decision that you made in the past five years, what would that be?

President Assad: Many people that we trusted we should not have trusted. That is the biggest problem, within Syria and outside Syria, like Erdogan for example in the past. Many Syrians during the conflict we discovered that they were fanatics, that they have extreme ideology like Muslim Brotherhood and some of them belonged to Al Qaeda, and now they are holding guns and fighting. At the very beginning we thought they were working for their country, that is the main issue, while if we talk about strategy, it was based on two pillars: the first one is dialogue, and the second one is fighting terrorism, these two pillars will not change, we will never change that.

Question 22: Even maybe the balance between those two pillars?

President Assad: You cannot talk about the balance because you have reality that changes every day. So, dialogue should continue to the maximum, and fighting terrorism should continue to the maximum, there should be correlation between them, with each other not against each other, so you do not need this balance, you need to go to the maximum with both, in parallel.

Question 23: Let us come for a minute to Czech's relations. The Czech Republic has been one of the very few countries which kept its ambassador in Syria for the whole conflict, how important was that for you?

President Assad: For many reason important, first of all, before the crisis, the relation with the Czech Republic was not warm, actually we had many differences, most of the relations with most of the European countries were much better than the relations with your country. Actually, what happened during the crisis when most of the European countries adopted the western propaganda against what is happening in Syria, your country kept its balance

regarding this relation. That does not mean that you support the Syrian government or support the Syrian president. This means you are playing the natural role that any country should play in keeping the relation even with the adversaries. How can you play a role, how can you know what is going on if you do not have relations? This is one aspect. The second aspect is that the Czech Republic is a small country and is part of the EU and it was under severe pressure from many countries in the West, including the United States, to change its position, which sometimes can be only symbolic by keeping only the embassy open. This could be symbolic in some cases. In spite of that, the Czech Republic wanted to be independent.

That is what we are missing in the world now. Most of the countries are not independent; most officials are not independent, especially in the West. So, the other aspect, a small country like the Czech Republic could be independent and that will bring respect, and has brought respect within Syria to the position of your country, whether we agree with their position or not. But at the end we, respect them. So, there is respect, there is a kind of statesman behavior, let us say, regarding your political positions and your officials, which is something that is very important for us. Now, the third aspect, because of the credibility of your positions, because many European governments recognize now and understand that you were right about what is going on in Syria, about keeping this open channel with the Syrian government, I think now they need your help in order to help them go back to the right track, especially regarding the political aspect. So, it has many aspects, this balanced position regarding the situation in Syria.

Question 24: One more aspect, President Zeman actually mentioned the possibility of signing a Syrian peace accord in Prague. Do you support this idea?

President Assad: Of course, any effort supporting the solution of the crisis in Syria, especially from a credible government, we will be very happy to cooperate with, definitely.

Question 25: But the symbolic meaning, I mean like the Geneva talks, there are talks in Vienna, would signing Prague would be realistic?

President Assad: Yes, of course it would be realistic. If you ask the Syrian people, they would say that I cannot have a peace conference in France for example because France supports terrorism and supports the war. They do not support peace. So, for example, if you mentioned Prague, there would be general acceptance of this idea because of the balanced position of your country.

Question 26: After all, what happened in Syria in those past few years, everybody has seen those horrible pictures. Do you have restless nights, do you have bad dreams?

President Assad: You live with this sadness everyday. You live with, how to say, the suffering of the people on a daily basis. Every hour you have this bad news, so it is becoming the atmosphere that you live in. But at the same time, the feeling of the Syrian people that one of the challenges of what is happening not only to fight, not only of political stands, but to live your daily life, and the most important example of that are the families of the martyrs in our country. You visit them, you look at them, they have strong will, and they try to live as much a normal life as they can, so you cannot put yourself in that bubble of sadness. You have to carry on your life and to bring hope to the people, and you should be optimistic that you can solve the problem and bring back Syria to its normality.

Question 27: Is there a space for doubts? For a man in your position?

President Assad: Doubts in what?

Reporter: Doubts about your deeds, about the steps that you made?

President Assad: In the past you mean or?

Reporter: Yes, I mean like if you ask yourself ...

President Assad: Of course, you have to revise yourself every day, and if you look at the details, you always have details that you think about, you always say it could be or could have been done in a better way because you do not have maybe full wrong or full right, so what is the percentage? It is something subjective, you change your mind about everything everyday. That depends on the situation, especially when you do not have one separated factor, all the factors are related, so the balance between the different actions that you take is not easy. You keep revising and you keep changing, but I think the only real evaluation and objective evaluation will be after the end of the crisis, because in the middle of the war it is difficult to reach conclusion about everything. So, I think later, after the crisis, we can say exactly where we were wrong. We definitely make mistakes like other humans.

Question 28: Where do you see Syria in ten years?

President Assad: In ten years, the only option that we have is to defeat terrorism. There is no way. Second, to keep the secular society and its different colors. Third, to have reforms in Syria: what the Syrian people want about their political system, and their future, so I think as I said the most important thing is secularism, second more integrated than before the crisis, although it was integrated, but you always have flows in societies. So, that is how I see it and I hope to achieve prosperity.

Question 29: Where do you see yourself in ten years? Can you imagine life outside the presidential office, maybe outside Syria?

President Assad: For me, to be frank, I never cared about the position, and I do not care about it today or in the future. I never thought about it, even before I became president, I never thought about the position. It is about what the Syrian people want. Now in the middle of the war, I am not going to say I am leaving for any reason, unless the Syrian people want me to leave. If there is a war, you have to do your job in order to protect your country; otherwise you are a traitor. That is not accepted for me or for the Syrians. When there is elections, the Syrian people will decide if they want me I will be happy to represent them. If they do not want me I will be happy to leave it, I do not have any problem.

Question 30: For five years, there have been discussions for you leaving the office. Sometimes it seems that it is not a question of if but when. But after five years, yet you are still here. What do you have that leaders of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya did not have?

President Assad: Public support. Whenever you do not have public support, you cannot succeed, you will fail. If you want to talk about those presidents that you mentioned, they did not have public support. And at the same time, they had western support at the very beginning, but when the West noted that there is no public support, they changed their positions and they told them you have to leave, while in Syria the only thing that kept me in this position is public support, nothing else.

Question 31: So, maybe the place in history is the ultimate survivor?

President Assad: Not survivor, I was very honest with the Syrians from the very beginning. I am a very honest person. Second, it is very important for people to know that they are fighting for their country and you are fighting with them, you do not have your own war, they do not fight for me to be president, to be in this position. I do not fight for myself to be in that position. That is something they know very well about me; otherwise if it is my war, if it is to keep my position no one will fight it, you would not have those people fighting and losing their lives for this.

Question 32: The last question, the most difficult one, when will there be peace in Syria?

President Assad: When those countries that I had mentioned: France, the UK, the US, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and some others stop supporting those terrorists, the next day the situation will be better and in a few months, you will have full peace in Syria, definitely.

Question 33: Any time frame?

President Assad: I told you in a few months. If they stopped, if they do not stop that, about what the obstacles they are going to put. But in spite of these obstacles, we are going to win, but as to when, this is going to be difficult to answer.

Question 34: Are you optimistic about that?

President Assad: Of course, definitely; otherwise, we would not fight. If we hadn't got hope we would not have fought all that war as Syrians.

Reporter: Many Thanks Mr. President.

President Assad: Thank you for coming. I enjoyed it very much.

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