

President Bashar al-Assad Interview: “It’s our Right to Defend our Country against any Kind of Invasion”

Portugal's RTP TV Channel

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Damascus, SANA-President Bashar al-Assad gave an interview to RTP TV channel (Portugal). Emphasis added by GR Editor

Following is the full text;

Question 1: Mr. President, let’s start with Aleppo if you don’t mind. There are still thousands of civilians trapped, trying to survive in a sort of sub-human conditions in the middle of a deluge of bombs. Why do you think that they refused to get out?

President Assad: The part that you mention in Aleppo, what they call it the eastern part, is occupied by the terrorists for the last three years, and they have been using the civilians as human shields. From our side, from our part as government, we have two missions: the first one is to fight those terrorists to liberate that area and the civilians from those terrorists, and at the same time to try to find a solution to evacuate that area from those terrorists if they accept, let’s say, what you call it reconciliation option, in which they either give up their armaments for amnesty, or they leave that area. The other thing we did as government is to open gates for the civilians to leave that area, and at the same time for the humanitarian convoys and help to go through those gates inside that part of Aleppo, but the terrorists publicly refused any solution, so they wanted to keep the situation as it is.

Question 2: But Mr. President, aren’t you using the jihadists to discredit all the oppositions at the eyes of the national and international public opinion, and in the end to try to wipe them all out?

President Assad: No, we cannot do that for a very simple reason: because we’ve been dealing with this kind of terrorism since the fifties, since the Muslim Brotherhood came to Syria at that time, and we learned that lesson very well, especially in the eighties, that terrorists cannot be used as a political card, you cannot put it in your pocket, because it’s like a scorpion; it will bite you someday. So, we cannot use jihadists because it’s like shooting yourself in the foot. They’re going to be against you sooner or later. This is in a pragmatic way, but if you think as value, we wouldn’t do it. Using terrorism or jihadists or extremists for any political agenda is immoral.

Question 3: But Mr. President, the people, the civilians inside Aleppo, couldn’t we assume that they probably don’t trust the government, they don’t trust the army, that they just want democracy, dignity, freedom? Can you give that to them?

President Assad: Let's talk about this point, regarding the reality; since the beginning of the crisis, since the terrorists started to control some areas within Syria, the majority of the Syrian civilians left that areas to join the government areas, not vice versa. If the majority of the Syrians don't trust the government, they should go the other way.



Let me tell you another example, which is a starker example. You were in Daraya, al-Muadamiya, a few days ago, when you came here, and the terrorists and militants who left that area to Idleb in the northern part of Syria to join their fellow terrorists, they left their families under the supervision of the government, and you can go and visit them now, if you want.

Question 4: Mr. President, I've been here first four years ago, and now. Are you winning the war, this war in Syria?

President Assad: We can say, you can win the war only when you restore stability in Syria. You cannot talk about winning the war as long as there's killing and destruction on daily basis. That doesn't mean we are losing the war; the army is making good advancement on daily basis against the terrorists. Of course, they still have the support of Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and some Western countries including the United States, but the only option that we have in that regard is to win. If you don't win and the terrorists win, Syria wouldn't exist anymore.

Question 5: But would you have done that also without Hezbollah, Iran, and Russia?

President Assad: They are here because they could offer very essential and important help, because the situation that we are facing now is not only about a few terrorists from within Syria; it's like international war against Syria. Those terrorists have been supported by tens of foreign countries, so Syria alone wouldn't be able to face this kind of war without the help of its friends. That's why their existence and their support was very essential.

Question 6: Isn't Mr. Putin your most important ally?

President Assad: Russia is very important, Iran is very important, Hezbollah is very important. All of them are important. Each one made important achievements against the terrorists in Syria, so it's difficult to say who is more important than the other.

Journalist: But what's the role of Russia in Syria nowadays?

President Assad: The most important part of their support is the aerial support, which is very essential, they have very strong firepower, and at the same time they are the main supply of our army for more than sixty years, so our army depends on the Russian support in different military domains.

Question 7: But are you free to decide the future of Syria, or are you dependent on Vladimir Putin's strategies?

President Assad: No, first of all, we are fully free, not partially, fully free, in everything related to the future of Syria. Second, which is more important or as important as the first part or the first factor, that the Russians always base their policies on values, and these values are the sovereignty of other countries, the international law, respecting other people, other cultures, so they don't interfere in whatever is related to the future of Syria or the Syrian people.

Question 8: But they have helped you quite a few times in the United Nations. They have vetoed a few resolutions condemning your government, and the Syrian Army. There are several reports regarding Syria for use of chemical weapons, human right abuses, war crimes. All of this in the framework of the United Nations.

President Assad: And many ask "what for?" I mean, what's in return, what did they ask in return, that's the question, actually, that's the content of your question, because we heard it many times, whether in the media or directly. Actually, first of all, for their values, because in these values that I'm talking about, the value of international law, and they have their interest as well. I mean, fighting the terrorists in Syria is not only in the interest of Syria or the Syrian people; in the interest of the Middle East, of Europe itself – something that many officials in the West don't see or don't realize or don't acknowledge – and in the interest of the Russian people, because they have been facing terrorists for decades now. So, the Russians are fighting for us, for the world, and for their self.

Question 9: But when you speak about values, democracy is a value.

President Assad: Of course.

Journalist: Freedom is a value.

President Assad: Of course.

Question 10: Can you say that Syria is a democracy, like the Western standards?

President Assad: The only one who can fight for these values like democracy and freedoms are the people of any country or any society, not the foreigners. Foreigners cannot bring freedom, cannot bring democracy, because this is related to the culture, to the different factors that affect or influence that society. You cannot bring it, you cannot import it. You cannot import anything from outside your country regarding the future of your country.

Question 11: But would you define Syria as a democracy?

President Assad: No, we were on the way to democracy. We didn't say that we are fully democratic, we were on the way, we were moving forward. Slowly or fast, that's subjective, cannot be objective, that's always subjective. But we're moving forward in that regard, of course. But the criteria or the paradigm for us is not the West, not the Western paradigm, because the West has its own culture, we have our own culture, they have their own reality, we have our own reality. So, our democracy should reflect our culture and our habits and our customs and our reality at the same time.



Question 12: I'm sure that you know that there is a new Secretary-General of the United Nations. How do you look at him, Mr. Guterres, taking into the account his well-known humanitarian approach to the situation?

President Assad: Of course, I agree about the headline of this approach. I say "headline" because you always – under the headline, you have many sub-headlines or different titles. When you talk about humanitarian, it doesn't only mean to offer the people the help, the food, their necessary needs for their life. The first thing, if you ask the Syrian refugees, for example, the first thing they want is to go back to their country. The first thing they want is to be able to live within Syria. That means help, humanitarian help, the way we understand it, food, medical care, any other, let's say, basics for the daily life. The second one is to have stability and to have security, which means humanitarian equals fighting terrorists. You cannot talk about humanitarian aid and supporting the terrorists at the same time. You cannot, you have to choose. And of course, I'm not talking about him; I'm talking about the countries that go to support his plan, because he needs the support of other countries, he cannot achieve that plan while many countries in the world are still supporting the terrorists in Syria. So, of course we support it, whether helping the people to live, to go back to their country, and to live in security without terrorists.

Question 13: He said already that peace in Syria is a priority. Are you available to talk with him, to work with him, for that purpose?

President Assad: Definitely, of course. It's his priority, and of course it's our priority, that's self-evident. It's not only our priority; it's a Middle Eastern priority, and when the Middle East is stable, the rest of the world is stable, because the Middle East is the heart of the world geographically and geopolitically, and Syria is the heart of the Middle East geographically and geopolitically. We are the fault line; if you don't deal with this fault line, you're going to have an earthquake, that's what we always said. That's why this priority is a hundred percent correct from our point of view, and we are ready to cooperate in any way to achieve stability in Syria, of course taking into consideration the interest of the country, and the will of the Syrian people.

Question 14: You said when we spoke that the United Nations are biased. You think with Mr. Guterres that can change a little bit?

President Assad: Everybody knows that the United Nations is not the Secretary-General; he has an important position, but the United Nations is the states within this organization, and to be frank, most of the people say only the five permanent members; this is the United Nations because they have the veto, they can do whatever they want and they can refuse whatever they want, and if there's a reform that is very much needed for this organization,

they can make veto or they can move forward in that regard. But at the same time, the way he presented himself as Secretary-General is very important. If you ask me “what do you expect from such a new official in that important position,” I would say I need two things: the first one is to be objective in every statement he could make regarding any conflict around the world, including Syria. The second one, which is related and complimentary with the first one, is not to turn his office into a part or branch of the State Department of the United States. That’s what we expect now. Of course, when he’s objective, he can play an important role in dealing with different officials in the United Nations in order to bring the policies of the different states – mainly Russia and the United States – toward more cooperation and more stability regarding Syria.

Question 15: But regarding Syria, there are a lot agendas: Qatar, Turkey, Russia, United States, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. How is it possible to try to find that peace process with so many agendas?

President Assad: Without bringing all those countries and the different factors in one direction, of course it’s going to be difficult. That’s why I always say the Syrian problem as isolated case, as Syrian case, is not very complicated. What makes it complicated is the interference from the outside, especially the Western interference because it’s against the will of the Syrian government, while the intervention of the Russians, Iranians, and Hezbollah is because of the invitation of the Syrian government. So, his role as Secretary-General in bringing all these powers together is very essential` and we hope he can succeed, it’s not easy of course.

Question 16: Let me pick out Turkey; their army is in your country, their President said last week that their interests lies beyond the natural borders; he referred to Mosul and Aleppo. Do you accept this?

President Assad: Of course not. You’re talking about a sick person; he’s megalomaniac President, he is not stable. He lives during the Ottoman era, he doesn’t live in the current time. He’s out of touch with the reality.

Question 17: But how you are going to do with their army inside your country?

President Assad: It’s our right to defend it; it’s invasion. It’s our right to defend our country against any kind of invasion. But let’s be realistic, every terrorist came to Syria, he came through Turkey with the support of Erdogan. So, fighting those terrorists is like fighting the army of Erdogan, not the Turkish army, the army of Erdogan.

Question 18: But it’s a NATO country, are you aware of that?

President Assad: Yeah, of course. Whether it is a NATO country or not, it doesn’t have the right to invade any other country according to the international law or to any other moral value.

Question 19: Mr. President, America’s new elected President, what do you expect of Donald J. Trump?

President Assad: We don’t have a lot of expectations because the American administration is not only about the President; it’s about different powers within this administration, the different lobbies that they are going to influence any President. So, we have to wait and see when he embarks his new mission, let’s say, or position within this administration as

President in two months' time. But we always say we have wishful thinking that the United States would be unbiased, respect the international law, doesn't interfere in other countries around the world, and of course to stop supporting terrorists in Syria.

Question 20: But he said in an interview that he seems to be ready to work with you in the fight against the Islamic State or ISIL, are you ready for such a move?

President Assad: Of course, I would say this is promising, but can he deliver? Can he go in that regard? What about the countervailing forces within the administration, the mainstream media that were against him? How can he deal with it? That's why for us it's still dubious whether he can do or live up to his promises or not. That's why we are very cautious in judging him, especially as he wasn't in a political position before. So, we cannot tell anything about what he's going to do, but if, let's say if he is going to fight the terrorists, of course we are going to be ally, natural ally in that regard with the Russian, with the Iranian, with many other countries who wanted to defeat the terrorists.

Question 21: So, you will cooperate with the Americans in the fight against terrorists?

President Assad: Of course, definitely, if they are genuine, if they have the will, and if they have the ability, of course we are the first ones to fight the terrorists because we suffered more than any other one in this world from terrorists.

Question 22: So, cooperate with the Americans that are now supporting the Kurds, the YPG that are trying to get into Raqqa?

President Assad: When you talk about cooperation, it means cooperation between two legal governments, not cooperation between foreign government and any faction within Syria. Any cooperation that doesn't go through the Syrian government is not legal. If it's not legal, we cannot cooperate with, and we don't recognize and we don't accept.

Question 23: Anyway, the Vice President, Mr. Pence, said that he has admitted the use of military force to prevent your military force from a humanitarian crisis in Aleppo, how do you look at it?

President Assad: This is against the international law again, and that's the problem with the American position; they think that they are the police of the world. They think they are the judge of the world; they're not. They are sovereign country, they are an independent country, but this is their limit; they don't have to interfere in any other country. Because of this interference for the last fifty years, that's why they are very good only in creating problems, not in solving problems. That's the problem with the American role. That's why I said we don't pin a lot of hopes of changing administrations because that context has been going on for more than fifty years now, and that's expected. If they want to continue in the same position of the United States creating problems around the world, that's what they have to do: only interfering in the matters of other nations.

Question 24: But returning to what the President, the newly elected American President said about cooperating with your government in the fight against Islamic State, do you expect a change also within European countries?

President Assad: Regarding fighting terrorism, we are ready to cooperate with anyone in this world with no conditions. That's crux of our policy, not today, not yesterday; for years, even before the war on Syria, we always said that. In the eighties, we asked for international

coalition against terrorism after the Muslim Brotherhood crisis in Syria when they started killing, of course they were defeated at that time. We asked for the same thing. So, this is a long-term policy that we base our policy on for years now.

Question 25: One last question. Mr. President, I need really to ask you this, because after all these years, do you still reject any responsibility for what happened in your country?



President Assad: No, I never rejected any responsibility, but that depends on the decision. When you talk about responsibility, you ask yourself what are the decisions that you take in order to deal with the crisis. Did the President order anyone to kill civilians, did he order the destruction, did he order supporting terrorism in his country? Of course not. My decision was, and the decision of the different institutions, and the decision of the different officials in Syria – I'm on top of them – was to have dialogue, to fight terrorists, and to reform as a response at the very beginning, response to the allegations, let's say, at that time, that they needed reform in Syria, we responded. So, that's the decision that I took. Would you say, or would anyone say that fighting terrorism is wrong? Making dialogue is wrong? Making reform is wrong? Protecting the civilians and liberating areas from terrorists is wrong? Of course not. So, there's a difference between responsibility of the policy and responsibility of the practice. In any practice, you have malpractice, that's another issue. When you talk about state and President, you always talk about the decisions and the policy.

Journalist: Thank you for being with RTP Mr. President.

President Assad: Thanks for you.

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