

# Syria President Bashar Al-Assad: Foreign Interference is a “Red Line”. Danger of “Domino Effect” throughout the Middle East

By [Bashar al Assad](#)

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*President Bashar al-Assad said that foreign interference is a red line, adding that if the unrest in Syria leads to the partitioning of the country or if the terrorist forces take control of Syria, or both of the above, the situation will inevitably first spill over into neighboring countries and then create a domino effect throughout the Middle East and beyond.*

The full text of the interview:

Question: Mr President, you are welcome on Ulusal TV station. My first question might be a bit strange, but I need to ask it, because in the Turkish and world media there has been a lot of information published to the effect that you were killed or that you have left the country. Can you confirm that you are still alive and still in Syria?



President Assad: First, I would like to welcome you and your team to Syria. It is a pleasure for me to talk to you today and through your station to the brotherly Turkish people. Clearly you can see that I am here and very much on the ground – not hiding in an underground bunker. These rumors tend to abound every once in a while to undermine the morale of the Syrian people. I neither live on a Russian warship nor in Iran. I live in Syria in the same place I have always lived.

Question: As you know, in the last meeting of the Arab League, the seat of the Syrian Arab Republic was given to the opposition and the discussion was opened about your legitimacy. Does that mean that your legitimacy has been withdrawn through this act of giving the seat of the Syrian Arab Republic to the opposition and the fact that you are no longer represented in the Arab League?

President Assad: Frankly speaking, the Arab League itself lacks legitimacy. It is an organization which represents Arab states and not Arab peoples. It has lacked legitimacy for many years, due to the fact that these Arab states themselves and their different positions do not reflect the will and the interests of the Arab peoples. Even when we were part of the Arab League, we were aware of this. Therefore this League is not in a position to give legitimacy or withdraw it. The step taken was more symbolic than anything else to create an illusion of illegitimacy.

Real legitimacy cannot be granted from either international organizations, officials outside your country or from other states. The Syrian People alone have the authority to grant or

withdraw legitimacy. If they withdraw it, then you become illegitimate. And similarly if they give you their support, then you are a legitimate president. Everything else is meaningless shenanigans as far as we are concerned.

Question: There are decisions, measures and actions taken against your country by some Arab countries and in the western world. On the other hand, the BRICS countries, which are observing the developments in Syria, have taken decisions different from those taken by the Arab countries and the western countries. How do you evaluate the activities, policies and the decisions of the BRICS countries.

President Assad: What you mentioned in your question emphasizes an important point. From the outset, the conflict in Syria was not entirely domestic. There are internal Syrian dynamics at play, but the underlying issues today are more directed towards redrawing the map of the region, and the conflicting interests of the great powers. The creation of the BRICS bloc means that the United States will no longer remain the only global power in the world. Today there are partners whose views and interests cannot be ignored when decisions and actions are taken in the international arena.

The BRICS group does not support President Bashar al-Assad or the Syrian state. It supports stability in this region. Everyone knows that if the unrest in Syria leads to the partitioning of the country or if the terrorist forces take control of Syria, or both of the above, the situation will inevitably first spill over into neighboring countries and then create a domino effect throughout the Middle East and beyond – East, West, North and South. This will lead to a state of instability for years and maybe decades to come. On these grounds the BRICS group supported the political solution in Syria against western powers.

As for some of the Arab or regional leaders which stood against Syria, it is well known that most of these countries are not independent in their political decisions. They act on foreign diktats. Internally, they might support a political solution, but when they are given their orders by the west, they must comply. Broadly speaking this is the reality across the region and internationally.

Question: Mr President, for the past two years we have witnessed conflict in Syria, armed conflict inside Syria. This conflict is supported on the one hand by the United States, France, Turkey and some Gulf countries. These countries say that the people are fighting your regime, and more than a hundred countries have stated that you should step down. On that background, are you thinking of stepping down and allowing someone else to replace you?

President Assad: Your question implies that a large number of western states and their allies, including Turkey and a number of Arab countries are against this President. At the same time you are implying that his people are also against him; so, how does he still remain in office? How can Syria remain steadfast for two years? I am not bothered by foreign countries being against me; I am a president elected by the Syrian people. We can conclude that for a president to take office or leave office is a National Syrian decision to be taken only by the Syrian people and not by the states which call for that.

Are these states concerned about democracy in Syria or concerned about the blood of the Syrian people? Let's be candid. If we start with the United States, we find that it has supported the crimes committed by Israel for decades, since Israel was created in our region. The United States committed massacres in Afghanistan and Iraq resulting in millions being killed, wounded or disabled. France and Britain committed massacres in Libya, with

support and cover from the United States. The current Turkish government is knee-deep in Syrian blood. Again are these states really concerned about Syrian blood?

The issue of the President will always remain for the Syrian people to decide and no other country in the world has anything to do with it.

Question: You said that what is taking place in Syria is mainly supported from outside, but we are in Damascus and we can hear the sounds of explosions and there is always the sound of shelling at different distances. Why is this happening in Syria?

President Assad: We are surrounded by a group of countries which are helping terrorists enter into Syria. Of course, not all of these countries are doing this intentionally. For instance, Iraq is against allowing terrorists access to Syria, but it has certain circumstances which do not allow it to fully control its borders. In Lebanon, the situation is divided with some parties supporting and others opposing sending terrorists into Syria. Turkey officially harbors these terrorists and sends them into Syria. Some terrorists enter Syria through Jordan and it is not clear whether that is intentional or not. As long as these terrorists continue to be smuggled into the country, we will continue to fight against them – this is only normal. It is actually a war in every sense of the word. These are not merely separate and dispersed security incidents. Terrorists are entering Syria in their thousands, and maybe in tens of thousands, it is difficult to set a precise figure. So, it is quite realistic to hear the sound of battles in many Syrian regions.

Question: Mr President, you said that the Turkish government officially and publicly supports the terrorists and provides different kinds of assistance to those terrorist groups, but we know that quite recently you used to enjoy good and friendly relations with Erdogan and the Turkish government. What happened and pushed things to this situation?

President Assad: Maybe Erdogan saw in the events taking place in the Arab world an opportunity for him to prolong his political life. This man's mentality is that of the Muslim Brotherhood, and from our experience in Syria with the Muslim Brotherhood for over 30 years, they are a group of opportunists, who use religion for their personal advantage. He saw that the countries that witnessed revolutions or coup d'états or foreign interventions brought in groups belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood to power. So, he saw in that a great opportunity for him to remain in power in different forms for many years to come. He turned against Syria because he saw a personal opportunity to remain in power. In the beginning, he tried to interfere in internal Syrian affairs. Even before the crisis, Erdogan was more interested in the Muslim Brotherhood than he was in Syrian-Turkish relations and even more than his interest in Turkey itself. This is the way this person thinks. When these circumstances occurred, he decided to stand by his personal interests and put them before Syrian/Turkish interests. As I said, he tried to interfere in Syrian internal affairs and later this Turkish government started to support the terrorists publically in Syria. They have become deeply involved in the bloodshed in Syria. It is only realistic in this situation for relations to be severed between us.

Question: When we ask Mr. Erdogan about what happened to the Syrian-Turkish relations, he claims that he was honest with President Bashar al-Assad and offered him proposals about reform, but President al-Assad rejected these proposals. Why didn't you take into account the proposals made to you by Mr. Erdogan?

President Assad: Regrettably, Erdogan has never uttered a single truthful word since the

crisis in Syria began. None whatsoever and I'm not exaggerating. The proposals he put forward were very general to the effect that the Syrian people should decide who should be president and what type of political system should govern them. I had previously spoken about these proposals in much more depth in many of my addresses.

We are currently in the midst of preparing for a National dialogue in which all the political groups in Syria will meet and decide on the best way forward. No matter how important Erdogan's proposals, they will not be more important than what the Syrian people want. Can there be anything more important than this? Whatever the Syrian people decide will be implemented.

There is however a simple question that we should ask. If Erdogan claims that he put forward proposals to solve the problem in Syria, then what is the relationship between those proposals and supporting the armed groups? Today, Erdogan is recruiting armed groups with Qatari financing, providing them with weapons, medical equipment and other logistical support on Turkish territory, and then sending them into Syria. Was this proposal part of those which he presented to me, or were those proposals a mere facade which he used in order to reach his objectives.

He knows that we supported dialogue; from day one, we announced that we agreed to conduct a dialogue with all Syrian parties. When the first stage, which was often referred to as 'the peaceful stage' failed, they shifted gear and started to support the armed groups. Erdogan lies and uses those proposals as a mask; we accept advice from any party, but we do not, under any circumstances, accept intervention in internal Syrian affairs. It seems that Erdogan misunderstood our position; he understood that the brotherly relations between Syria and Turkey allow him to interfere in internal Syrian affairs with the objective of overthrowing the Syrian state. But the situation was clear to me from the very early days.

Question: There are news stories in some media channels in Turkey to the effect that there are Turkish officers and security services personnel involved in the terrorist acts and help the terrorist organizations, that they entered the Syrian territories and they were involved in direct activities in support of these terrorist organizations. Some media say that Syria will respond in kind against Turkey as long as Turkey is involved to this degree in these operations. What do you say to all these claims?

President Assad: As I said, the present Turkish government is directly contributing to the killing of the Syrian people. Some people expect Syria to retaliate but we will not do it. Firstly we are against crime and therefore we reject criminal acts. Secondly, we believe the Turkish people are a brotherly people. Thirdly, this is what Erdogan wants; he wants to create a conflict between the peoples of Syria and Turkey, in order for him to get popular support for his policies and restore some of his popularity. We will not fall into this trap for both considerations of principle and because our interest lies with the Turkish people. A conflict between our two peoples will not be in the interest of either Syria or Turkey; it will only make things more complicated. What we have done in the past 10 or 12 years since President Cezar visited Syria in 2000 was to annihilate the bad history between the Arabs and the Turks. Now Erdogan is trying to jeopardize it. We will not commit any act against the Turkish people.

As for the Turkish intelligence services, up until this point, we have not captured any member of the Turkish intelligence services or the Turkish army. This doesn't mean that

they are not involved; the intelligence services are providing support from outside Syria. They provide all the training, the equipment, the communications and other forms of political and media support as required. From the confessions of many terrorists, we know that there are individuals in Turkey who are involved, but the basic principle of this involvement lies in the policy adopted by the current Turkish government. The fact that there is no intelligence personnel on the ground does not mean they are not involved.

Question: Your statements, Mr President, have been clear concerning Turkish polices. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said "I would rather resign my position than shake the hand of President al-Assad if he remained in power." What does that say about the relations between the two countries.

President Assad: I am not going to dignify that with a response. Suffice to say that I was given an appropriate upbringing in my home and clearly this is not true in his case.

In the way he speaks, he does not embody the high moral standards of the Turkish people, which I witnessed all too clearly during my visits to Turkey. I, on the other hand, have learned from the high moral standards of the Syrian people, and hence I do not feel the need to respond.

As to the bridges, my relationship with Erdogan was meant to be reflected on the Syrian-Turkish relations. But when the Prime Minister, his government, or members of his government are involved in the bloodshed in Syria, these bridges have no place, neither between us, nor between them and the Syrian people who have no respect for them at all.

Question: As you might have noticed, when President Barack Obama was in Israel, suddenly Prime Minister Netanyahu said that he apologized to Turkey concerning what happened on the Marmara ship. How do you read all these developments?

President Assad: There is a clear and obvious question in such a situation. The same person, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was Prime Minister when the Marmara massacre took place 3 years ago, he is still Prime Minister today. Why didn't he apologize during these past years? What has changed? Erdogan is the same and Netanyahu is the same. What has changed is the situation in Syria. This confirms very clearly and precisely that there is a Turkish-Israeli agreement over the situation in Syria. This also confirms that Erdogan is now in alliance with Israel in order to aggravate the situation in Syria. Erdogan failed in the past two years to achieve his objectives in mobilizing Turkish public opinion concerning Syria to his satisfaction and he also failed in achieving the collapse of the Syrian state; Syria was steadfast despite the ferocious battles. He had no ally to help him except Israel and Israel is our obvious enemy who occupies our land. I believe this is a clear indicator of the alliance between them, at the same time, maybe this apology also helps Erdogan restore some of his status and credibility which he had also lost inside Turkey.

Question: I want to pick up on something which happened in the recent past. There has been a meeting between Erdogan and Ocalan on March 21st. During that meeting the two sides talked about the formation of a new Middle East consisting of Arabs, Assyrians, Kurds and Turks. Have you followed these meetings and statements?

President Assad: What we have at the moment is the information available through the media. We have not received official details from any party as of yet. Since the initial steps taken in Turkey a few years ago to solve the Kurdish problem, our declared position has



been to support any solution between the Turks and the Kurds because we do not want to see more bloodshed in Turkey which will no doubt have a negative impact on the region. Any genuine solution in this direction has our support, because the Kurdish people are a natural part of the fabric of the region. They are not guests or new immigrants; they have been living in these lands for centuries, for thousands of years. But the vision for the solution of the Turkish-Kurdish relations depends on the credibility of Erdogan. I don't trust this person, and I doubt that he will fulfill his promises. All the steps he is taking are temporary measures aimed at winning him political support. Here again we ask the same question. Why didn't he take the same steps a few years ago? Again, this is related to the Syrian situation. But let's not prejudge the situation. Let's wait and see.

Question: You said that finding a solution to the Kurdish problem is one of the important issues for the region. Can we hear from your Excellency a broader vision and in detail about how we can solve this issue?

President Assad: We need to be clear, nationalism is different from ethnicity. We live in a mixed region; the fact that you are Turkish doesn't mean that you can't be Kurdish or Armenian or Arab in origin with your own culture and language. This is the situation in Turkey as well as in Syria. When I say Arab, it is not necessarily linked to an Arab ethnicity or race. Both nationalisms, Turkish and Arab, exemplify highly civilised and all encompassing nationalistic models that are meant to be inclusive of everybody.

The problem with this concept in the past, was perhaps that the adopted mentality was one of rejecting and eliminating other cultures. I believe the most beautiful aspect of this region is its diversity and the most dangerous aspect is for us not to see this diversity as enriching and empowering. When we regard it as a weakness, we invite foreign forces to play us against each other and create conflicts.

This was the case at the beginning of the last century when the conflict started between the Arabs and the Turks during the final days of the Ottoman Empire. Many of the Arab nationalist groups wanted Arab nationalism within the Ottoman Empire. However things moved towards conflict as a result of mistakes made by both the Turks and the Arabs as well as the result of intervention from foreign players.

That's why we need to look at the situation today in the same way; we are made from the same fabric weaved from many different colours.

Question: Mr President, one of the most important issues being discussed currently in Turkey is the question of the PKK. There are discussions about organizations operating on Syrian territories which are cooperating with the PKK and that the PKK has great influence over these organizations. They say that this organization is interested in creating a military vacuum in northern Syria so that it can be filled by these new Kurdish forces. How do you read all these reports, Mr President?

President Assad: When there is chaos in any state, as is the case in Syria at the moment, certain groups are bound to appear in order to fill the vacuum created. Sometimes these groups are gangs with the only purpose of killing and stealing. Sometimes these are political groups, and other times they might be parties with certain policies. There's no doubt that there are some groups which seek separation; they exist in Syria, Turkey, Iraq and other places. But we cannot generalize this situation to include all Kurds based on the agenda of small groups. Most Kurds are patriotic people who want to live in Syria. So, the emergence

of certain cases should not lead us to generalize the situation or even to assume that things are moving towards separation. Separation needs a certain environment, be it widespread public support or external factors, which is very different from the circumstances prevailing in Syria at the moment. I'm not concerned about this issue at the moment.

Question: Mr President, this is a very important issue. Since the beginning of the events in Syria, certain parties and research centers started to talk about a new project involving the separation of northern Syria, northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey and separating these regions from their central states. Do you think there is a danger of northern Syria separating from the central state?

President Assad: As I said, the current circumstances in Syria are not conducive in this respect particularly in terms of public opinion at large. This notion of separation is completely rejected by the Syrian people and the Syrian state; no sovereign state accepts for a part of its territory to be cut out or separated from its mainland. This position is categorically unacceptable and is not subject to any discussions with us in Syria.

Question: Based on our questions and your answers, there seems to be a clear plan put forward by western countries in cooperation and coordination with some regional countries to create a greater Kurdistan by separating northern Iraq, western Iran, northern Syria and southeastern Turkey. They seemed determined to achieve this goal. Are we moving in the direction of achieving this goal?

President Assad: I don't believe that the four states in question – Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq – would agree to this proposition. Independent states in today's world seek integration rather than separation. Unfortunately our region is an exception which is a sign of backwardness. Today, large countries come together, the BRICS being an example. States seek to come together and form larger blocs because this is a requirement in the age we live in. So, why should we go in the opposite direction in our region and seek fragmentation? What is there to prevent people who belong to different nationalities, ethnicities, religions and sects to live with each other? Therefore if we accept the notion of separation then this means we have to live with the consequences – namely fragmentation into small mini-states based on ethnicities and sects in an area that is extremely rich in its diversity; this creates a dangerous situation that would precipitate wars in the future. This is why I don't think that this is a sound proposition. Every one of these four concerned states should do its utmost to make sure all its people feel that they are first-class citizens with equal stakes in their state. This solution is therefore, clear and simple. On the other hand, when a citizen feels that he is second or third class, he is bound to think of separation or even act against his own state.

Question: You used to have an interesting project, Mr President. You talked about the political and economic unification of the five seas and the countries lying among these seas. How can we benefit from such a project? Can you please explain that to the Turkish audience?

President Assad: This is what I meant when I said that in this age we need to unify. This doesn't mean becoming a single state in the same way that old states existed in the past, in large extended empires. Today we can unify through our interests at least. For instance, we can build railways, different forms of land transport, gas, oil, electricity, all forms of energy, hence creating networks between our countries in this extremely strategic region of the world which lies between the five seas. This in itself will bring a lot of investment into the region, creating a great deal of prosperity and making these states and their peoples strong

enough to face any foreign intervention.

This vision needs will and independent decision-making, especially since many western states have no interest in the creation of such projects in the Middle East. This also needs security and stability. I don't believe that the right conditions exist now for such a project, because there are problems in Syria, in Lebanon, unrest in Iraq, most of which are a result of western intervention; there is a government in Turkey, which I don't consider to be independent or to have such a vision, and Turkey is essential for this project due to its strategic position. This doesn't mean that we should cancel this project. It should remain in our minds, because the future of this region depends on grand projects like this. If we each remain confined within our national borders, we will be considered small on a global scale, even large countries such as Turkey and Iran. We cannot be powerful unless we create such strategic trans-border projects.

Question: Mr President, based on your answer to my question, I want to move to another issue which is related to sectarian war. There seems to be a Sunni-Shiite war going on in the region and many people are talking about this. Do you see these conflicts as sectarian by nature?

President Assad: This issue was first raised in 1979 on the backdrop of the Iranian revolution which removed one of America's most important allies in the region. The only solution was to portray that revolution as a Shiite revolution and that other sects should oppose it. On those grounds, the Iraq war against Iran was invented and supported by some Gulf countries. A short while later, the Muslim Brothers in Syria were used for the same objective, in order to create sectarian strife. They failed in the first and the second attempt.

Now, three decades later, there's no other choice but to create sectarian strife within these countries. That's why they have raised this issue again and the slogans chanted, particularly in the early days of the Syrian crisis, were sectarian in their substance. So far, they have failed. Had they succeeded the whole region would have been fragmented as a result of this conflict. The positive aspect in all of this, is the increasing public awareness against sectarian ideologies, despite the fact that there are some sectarian pockets which reflect an underlying ignorance which is usually present in every society.

I believe that the essence of the conflict now is not sectarian. The conflict is between forces and states seeking to take their peoples back into historic times, and between states wanting to take their peoples into a prosperous future. It is a conflict between those who want their homeland and their state to be independent from the west and between those which seek to be satellites of western powers only to achieve their particular interests. At the same time, these forces are part of an international struggle of conflicting interests of which Turkey and Syria are a part. This struggle has been affected by different factors which might lead to the fragmentation of the region, enabling global powers to control our destiny and future.

Question: Nevertheless, outside Syria, in some countries, policies of division and fragmentation based on ethnicities and sects are being officially adopted. On the other hand, we lived and witnessed what you have been talking about in Turkey, particularly after the secular republic was created and led by Mustafa Kamal Atatürk. Unfortunately, however, these states and governments have distanced themselves from this project and started to adopt religious and sectarian projects. How do you see the future of these political systems?



President Assad: These political systems and establishments which are seeking division and fragmentation are preparing for wars which might last for centuries rather than decades in our region – destroying everything, preventing development and prosperity, and taking us back to life in the Middle Ages. This is very dangerous.

When I refer to secularism, I'm speaking about the freedom of religions and religious practices. Our region is primarily conservative, most people are religious and they should have the freedom to practice their religious rituals. We shouldn't think for a moment that there is contradiction between ethnicities and religions. This is the essence of our thinking about secularism. This is why we should always aim to unify the people in our region. As I mentioned earlier no matter what happens between the governments in Syria and Turkey, it should not affect the relations between the peoples of our countries which constitutes the only guarantee for our unity as diverse and rich societies.

Question: Mr President, do you follow closely the developments in Turkey?

President Assad: This is in keeping with the norm. Because what happens within Turkey as both a neighboring and large country with its strategic position, will reflect directly on what happens inside Syria. At the same time there are so many similarities: the nature of the people, their emotions and the makeup of the social fabric in Turkey are very similar to those in Syria. So again, what happens in Turkey will have an impact on Syria. That's why we believe that stability in Turkey is in our best interest, and vice versa, if you have turbulences, we will be affected. The challenge is how to convince the Turkish officials in the current government, particularly the Prime Minister, that the fire in Syria will burn in Turkey. Unfortunately, he doesn't see this reality.

Question: Concerning dialogue with the opposition. You called for a political solution and for direct dialogue with the opposition. Are there red lines for this dialogue?

President Assad: The red lines are foreign intervention. Any dialogue should be a Syrian dialogue only. No foreign intervention is allowed in this dialogue. Other than this, there are no red lines. Syrian citizens can discuss anything they want, because Syria is the homeland for all Syrians and they can discuss anything they want. There are no red lines.

Question: In the framework of a sectarian conflict, there are claims which appear on TV stations and some other media outlets to the effect that Syria is ruled by a dictatorial Alawite regime whose only objective is to eliminate the Sunna; and even the assassination of Mohammad Said Ramadan al-Bouti comes within this effort. What is your response to such claims?

President Assad: I referred at the beginning to the diversity of this region of which Syria is a part and has been living in stability for many decades without any internal problems. How can it be stable without a government that constitutes a mirror image of its people? When a government in any country, is dominated by one or more groups of people, and is therefore not reflective of the whole population it cannot survive. It will either fall in no time or the country as a whole will fall. These claims are therefore not true. We have been living together in this country for hundreds of years; and the government has always reflected the diversity of the people and their participation in its affairs. As for the late Dr al-Bouti, it is ridiculous to accuse the Syrian government of his assassination. This accusation has been made by the same groups who were accusing him, only days and weeks before, of being the mouthpiece of the authorities on religious affairs. This was done in order to marginalise his

popularity amongst the Syrian people and his followers in the Muslim world. In fact, he was not a mouthpiece for the authorities as they describe him. He never sought any kind of authority; he never wanted to be a minister or a mufti; he never asked for any money; he used to live a simple life. His only fault was that he was at the forefront of a group of religious leaders who stood decisively in the face of the plot to create sectarian strife amongst Syrians. Dr al-Bouti was at the forefront, firstly because of his status in Syria and the Muslim world, and secondly because of his deep awareness and understanding of the truth of what was happening. There is no doubt that the stances of these religious leaders, and among them Dr al-Bouti, was crucial in foiling this attempt to create sectarian strife. That is why they assassinated Dr al-Bouti, as well as other religious leaders, one as recently as a few days ago in Aleppo. Everybody who spoke about true religion, about tolerance and moderation in religion was targeted from the beginning of the crisis, no doubt Dr al-Bouti had the greatest effect when confronting this war. He didn't stand with the state, he stood with his nation and therefore paid the price with his life. In any case, he always spoke of his readiness for martyrdom.

Question: Thank you Mr President for granting this interview to Ulusal TV station. Finally, is there anything else you want to say to the Turkish people?

President Assad: We are now at a crucial juncture in history. By this I mean Syria, Turkey and the whole region. Even though some of the changes happening in our region have some spontaneous elements they also contain many externally planned elements with the objective of controlling this region. What is happening now is essentially similar to what happened a hundred years ago in terms of re-dividing the region. But a hundred years ago, we accepted the division as it was drawn by Sykes and Picot when they drew the borders for you, for us and for others in this region. This time, however, we shouldn't accept any redrawing of the region except in accordance with decisions suitable to us as peoples living in this region. We should be the people who take the decision. Unfortunately, this vision is lacking for many of the governments which accepted to act in accordance with foreign diktats, or at least to please western countries in particular.

That's why we see in the past two years, there have been many attempts to destroy the relationship between the Turkish and Syrian peoples. I want to say that what we have started twelve years ago with President Cezar should continue under all circumstances, by this I mean the Turkish-Arab brotherhood. This cannot be achieved if Syrian-Turkish relations are not good, because, along with Iraq, we are the closest Arab country to Turkey. So we should continue to move in this direction and as I said prosperity in any country will be reflected on the other. By the same token, fire in either country will also spill over into the other. Governments come and go, they do not stay forever. That's why we shouldn't allow governments and officials, especially foolish and inexperienced officials, to undermine this relationship which should be built by us and not by any foreign power. This is my message to the Turkish people and once again I am happy to receive you today.

Question: Thank you very much, Mr President.

President Assad: Once again thank you, and please convey my best wishes to the staff of Ulusal TV and Aydinlik newspaper.

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