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Syria's President Bashar al-Assad: "The West has no Desire to Combat Terrorism". West Channels "Money and Armaments" to ISIS

By Bashar al Assad
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President Bashar al-Assad gave an interview to Portuguese State Television, RTP, the following is the full text:

Question 1: In a few days, it will be 4 years since the protests began in Syria against the government of Bashar al-Assad. From then on it has been a massacre. More than 220 thousand people have died, and there are 4 million displaced people. The arrival of Daesh (Islamic State) has made the situation more grim. For this reasons, it's important to speak to a key figure in all this process. Today, he gives his first interview ever to a Portuguese media outlet. The Syrian President, Bashar Al Assad.

How do you describe your country today, Mr. President?

President Assad: Let me start by commenting on the number that you mentioned in your introduction, about the number of victims in Syria, which is 200,000, that's been mentioned in the Western media recently, 220,000. That number is exaggerated. Always the West has exaggerated the numbers in Syria. Actually, it is not about whether they are hundreds of thousands or tens of thousands. Victims are victims, killing is killing, and terrorism is terrorism. Actually, it's not about being a mere number represented on a graph, on a chart, like a spreadsheet. It's about families that lost members, lost dear ones, lost relatives. It's a human disaster we have in Syria.

This crisis has affected every part of Syria, every Syrian citizen regardless of his affiliation or allegiance. It affected his livelihood, food, medicaments, medical care, basic requirements like education. Hundreds of hospitals were destroyed, thousands of schools were destroyed, tens of thousands or maybe hundreds of thousands of students don't go to school. All that will create the fertile habitat and good incubator for terrorism and extremism to grow. But despite all this hardship, the Syrians are determined to continue fighting terrorism, defending their country, and defying hegemony.

Question 2: Syria is not much of a country nowadays. The Syrian Army does not control all the borders, you have international coalition flying in your skies. On the grounds there are different entities. Is Syria as we have known it lost or finished?

President Assad: You cannot talk about a finished Syria when the people are unified behind their government and their army and fighting terrorism and still have institutions working. We still have subsidies, we still pay salaries, we pay the salaries even in some areas under the control of the terrorists themselves. We still have the-

Question 3: You send money to…?

President Assad: Exactly, we send salaries. Because they are employees, and have their own salaries. We send vaccines to those areas for the children.

Question 4: So you cooperate with the Islamic State?

President Assad: No, no. We don't. We send them, and we deal with the civilians who are the mediators with the terrorists, or the militants. But at the end, all these basic requirements reach those areas. So, we don't have "Syria is finished" and we don't have a failed state, actually. But if you want to talk about something different you mentioned in your question, which is the breaching of our airspace illegally by the alliance airplanes and by terrorists supported or working as proxy to regional countries-

Question 5: And borders.

President Assad: This is a failure of the international system, this international system that's been represented by the United Nations and the Security Council, and that is supposed to solve the problems and protect the sovereignty of different countries and prevent war. Actually, it has failed in doing so. So, what we have now is a failed United Nations; failed to protect international citizens including in Syria, Libya, Yemen, and in other countries.

Question 6: But you also failed. The Syrian Army also fails, because a lot of Christians have been abducted recently in the north.

The role of the Syrian Army, like any national army, is to protect every single citizen

President Assad: Actually, the role of the Syrian Army, like any national army, is to protect every single citizen, regardless of his affiliation, religion, sect, ethnicities, and so on. If you have mentioned this, I would say yes, we would like to and we wish that the Syrian Army would be able to help every Syrian since the beginning of the crisis. But the main obstacle why the Syrian army couldn't do so, and as part of this couldn't help the Christians a few days ago that have been kidnapped by ISIS, is the unlimited support that's been offered to those terrorists by the Western and regional countries.

Question 7: What we have seen until now is several attempts to have a peace conference that all have failed. What we have until now, it's talks about talks. What can break this deadlock, Mr. President?

President Assad: Do you mean in Geneva?

Question 8: Geneva 1, Geneva 2, the Russian initiative was a fiasco.

President Assad: The solution is political, but if you want to sit with someone or a party that doesn't influence the situation on the ground, it's going to be talk for the sake of talk, that's correct. We didn't choose the other party in Geneva. It was chosen by the West, by Turkey, by Saudi Arabia, by Qatar. It wasn't a Syrian opposition that we made dialogue with. You're right; if you want to make dialogue, you have to make it with Syrian opposition, Syrian partner, Syrian people who represents Syrians in Syria, not who represent other countries. So, what happened in Geneva wasn't the model that we have to follow.

Question 9: But, what you are saying, is that an acceptable opposition for you, or…?

President Assad: Of course, any opposition that works for the Syrian, to defend its country, represents Syrians or part of the Syrian population…

Question 10: Within the framework of the Syrian state?

President Assad: No, no. Any opposition who works for the Syrian people. It's not related to the state, it's not related to the government.

Question 11: So, you're excluding the Syrian National Coalition?

President Assad: I don't exclude anyone as long as he's Syrian. I'm talking about criteria. Anyone, or any party, who meet with these criteria, we can consider him as opposition. If the coalition is formed in the West or any other country, it's not considered Syrian. It doesn't represent the Syrian people. The Syrian people won't accept him.

Question 12: But are you able to discuss with them or not?

President Assad: Actually, what we have followed since the beginning of the crisis, we didn't leave any stone unturned. We tried every possible solution in order not to allow anyone to say "if they didn't do this, that would have happened." So, we discussed even with the coalition, although we know in advance that it doesn't represent Syrians, it represents the countries that formed it. And second, it doesn't have any influence on the ground in Syria, even with the militants, even with the terrorists, even with anyone who is involved in the problem within Syria.

Question 13: So you're saying that the "Free Syrian Army" doesn't have influence on the ground? That only al-Nusra and Islamic State have influence on the ground?

President Assad: Even Obama said that, he said that the moderate opposition is a fantasy. Most of the world now knows, what they called moderate opposition, they called it "Free Syrian Army," they have so many other names, all of them are fantasy. Actually, who is controlling the terrorism arena in Syria are either ISIS or al-Nusra, mainly, and some other smaller factions.

Question 14: So, in the end, the solution for Syria is a military solution, and not a negotiated peace?

President Assad: No, actually, what we have been doing recently, as long as we don't have a party to make negotiations with who can influence the militants on the ground, we went to make reconciliation with the militants in some areas, and that worked, and this is a very realistic political solution. Actually, that is how you exclude the military solution, by discussing with them making a safe area.

Question 15: About the discussions, you have Geneva 1, Geneva 2, the Russian initiative, in all of that there are not, how shall I say, things in common. Is there anything, any issue that you know it is possible, why not start with them? Is there anything in common between you and them?

President Assad: If you want to talk about what happened in Moscow, it's different from what happened in Geneva, because they invited some of the opposition, because we can't talk about one opposition; we have many different oppositions. You don't put them in one

basket. You have some of them represent Syrians, some of them they don't represent anyone, and so on. So, we have common things with some of the opposition that were invited to Moscow, so this is just the beginning of the dialogue. The dialogue may take a long time. But at the end, if you want to not talk about dialogue, talk about the end results on the ground, the question is, who of those parties that we call opposition, who of them represent Syrian people and can influence the militants on the ground in order to save Syrian blood? That is the question. We don't have an answer yet, because they have to prove, we don't have to prove. We know we have our army, the army will obey the government, if the government gives an order, it will follow the order. But what about the others? Who is going to control the terrorists? That is the question.

Question 16: You pointed out that some countries, like France, don't want a peace conference to succeed. Why is that?

President Assad: Actually, you have two points, or two reasons, let's say. First one is not related only to the French; it's related to every official who is complicit and involved in the propaganda and the aggression against Syria during the last four years. It's about the end of this war will unmask those officials in front of their public opinion, in a country where there is public opinion. I don't mean Saudi Arabia and Qatar, where there is no public opinion anyway. But generally, they will be unmasked about the question "what is the revolution that you mentioned, that you talked about? How could a revolution collapse or fail if you have the support of the West, the support of regional countries, all this money and armaments and so on, and you supposed that he's a dictator who is killing his good people, so the people are against him, regional countries are against him, and the West is against him, and he succeeded.It's one of two options: you're either lying to us, or you're talking about a superman. Because you don't a superman, he's a regular president, it means he could withstand for four years only because he has the public support. It doesn't mean full public support, one hundred percent, or absolute public support, but definitely have support from a part, a large amount of the Syrian people." So, this is a lie that the public opinion in the West and in other countries will ask the officials about. What about the Arab spring that turned out to be – instead of budding flowers – blood and killing and destruction? Is that the spring that you talked about? This is one reason.

The other reason is more specific towards France. Not limited, but more specific, let's say. It's about the financial relation between France and the Gulf states. Maybe because they have financial difficulties, I don't know why. But this financial relations, and I don't have any proof whether this is about the vested interest of some officials in France or if it's about public interest, I don't have any proof, but at the end, these financial interests push those officials in France to exchange their values of liberty and fraternity and democracy, all the things that they used to preach, the exchange those values for petrodollars. So now those French officials and some others in the West, they don't practice what they preach anymore.

Question 17: But the tide seems to change a little bit. You had French MPs here. It was an organized visit, or it came as a surprise to you?

President Assad: No, no. It wasn't a surprise, because it wasn't the first delegation to come to Syria.

Question 18: French delegation?

President Assad: French and from other countries. Different kinds of delegations, activists,

mediators, some officials came to deal with us under the table, not-

Question 19: This was organized with your government and…?

President Assad: Yes, it was officially organized, and they had a schedule when they came. It was weeks before, it wasn't a surprise.

Question 20: With French diplomats as well or not?

President Assad: We had the impression, and it's a strong impression, that most of the government, the main officials in the government, they know about it in advance, and they didn't oppose.

Question 21: So, did they send you any message?

President Assad: No, there wasn't a message, and they came to see the reality on the ground, and I think that's the reflection – not just this delegation; the delegations that came to Syria recently from different countries, especially from the West, is a reflection of not believing, not taking in with the narrative, the insidious narrative about Syria in the West by their officials. They want to know the truth, I mean it's a kind of suspicion about the whole propaganda in the West.

Question 22: So, in a sense, the tide is changing because probably there are some people thinking that even though it's a bad solution, it's better to deal with Bashar al-Assad than to deal with the worse solution which is going to be the Islamic State.

President Assad: I don't think the general public thinks about the second part, it's about the first part, about what's happening and how everything we said in Syria at the beginning of the crisis they say later. They said it's peaceful, we said it's not peaceful, they've killing – these demonstrators, that they called them peaceful demonstrators – have killed policemen. Then it became militants. They said yes, it's militants. We said it's militants, it's terrorism. They said no, it's not terrorism. Then when they say it's terrorism, we say it's Al Qaeda, they say no, it's not Al Qaeda. So, whatever we said, they say later. That created a lot of suspicion in the West. They want to come to understand this part. Why are you saying whatever Syria was saying in the beginning? Of course, in the West, the propagandists, whether officials or media, the added something only to the real story; that ISIS and al-Nusra was created of Assad, or it's because of his policy, and so on.

Question 23: But you freed a lot of jihadists from the prisons that went to ISIS, to the Islamic State.

President Assad: No, that's before the crisis. They were sentenced for a few years, and when the sentence ended, they left prison. We didn't. We never did. So no, we have institutions, we have a judicial system in Syria.

Question 24: Anyway, Europe is facing more and more threats of terrorism linked to jihadist movements, some of them with connections here in Syria, I mean Al Qaeda or the Islamic State. And the question here: is Syria able to help the European countries in fighting these threats of terrorism?

President Assad: This is like a building; you cannot build a building without having the foundation, so what is the foundation that you need in this this case? First, you need officials

in Europe to have the will to fight terrorism. This is something that we don't have to this moment. Second thing, to have prudent policies. We cannot have arrogant, stubborn officials that only adopted egotistical policies. Third, which is very important, fighting terrorism should be a value, should become a value. It cannot be a sort of opportunism, like because now you are suffering in Europe from terrorism, you're scared, you want to fight terrorism in this region. What about a few years ago? You didn't suffer.

Question 25: But can you help the…?

President Assad: If they don't help themselves first, we cannot. If they help themselves, we are ready to help. If you build this foundation, if you have this foundation, you can go to the building. This is where you can talk about how to integrate the community in your country, how to have exchange of information with intelligence, you have many ways. Of course we can, but you need to have the foundation in order to succeed.

Question 26: Mr. President, let me quote, "the Syrian people aspire more freedom, justice, human rights. They aspire to more plurality and democracy." Your Foreign Minister said this in the Geneva conference. However, the state of Syria is perceived differently in the West. Till now, it's perceived as brutal, ruthless, dictatorial, and it's not just a question of image, so how is it possible to convince the people that…?

President Assad: This is illogical and unrealistic, because how can somebody who kills his people and oppresses his people be supported by the same people? How? Tell me about this contradiction. Look at it from the outside. Is it palatable, can you understand? It doesn't.

Question 27: But, Mr. President, the reality is that if you allow me to go backwards, and try to-

President Assad: Before the crisis.

Question 28: Let me just try to… you started four years ago with peaceful demonstrators that were repressed, then you are blamed, your government is blamed, for a lot of allegations of human rights violations in your own ranks, repression. You have the Cesar reported, defected from the army, with photos of massacres, of torture of the opposition. You have allegations that you have used chemical weapons. You have allegations of using the barrel bombs till now, and so, the human rights reports watcher about Syria, they are not very good for you, your government, and the Syrian Army.

President Assad: You are talking about massive propaganda for four years. We cannot answer every one in one interview, but I will say the demonstrations never were peaceful, because in the first week, we lost many of our policemen. How? How could a peaceful demonstration kill a policeman? It wasn't peaceful, so, this is the beginning of the lies, it's the beginning of the propaganda.

Question 29: All lies, all the time? Four years of lies, Mr. President?

President Assad: Exactly, that's what happened. Because, how do you have ISIS? Suddenly? You don't have ISIS suddenly, you don't have armaments suddenly, you don't have al-Nusra Front suddenly. It's a long process, you can't have it just in few weeks. Suddenly, everybody is talking about ISIS. Go back to our statements from the very beginning, and you can see that the evolution of the events was going in that regard from the very beginning, and we said that. They didn't want to listen; they wanted to listen to their statements.That's what I

say. It's impossible to only tell lies in the West. How can you tell the truth if you don't have an embassy in this country? How can you tell the truth if you listen to Qatar and Al-Jazeera that were paying the money to those terrorists?

Question 30: So you blame Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia for being the backbone of the jihadists? You have the proof?

President Assad: Very simple; what is the ideology of ISIS? What is the ideology? It's the Wahhabi ideology. Do we have it in Syria? Do we have it in Morocco? In the western Arab world? Actually, it existed in Saudi Arabia.

Question 31: It's the same as in Saudi Arabia.

President Assad: Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This is the Wahhabi ideology. Second, Erdogan is Muslim Brotherhood. He's a very staunch advocate of the Muslim Brotherhood ideology which was the first organization in the history of Islam, in the beginning of the last century, who promoted violence in implementing political agenda. So, you have those, and that's enough. Going back to the Western media, in the Western media, and the American media in particular, they say 80% of the terrorists are coming from Turkey. You have another realistic one, what you called in your media Kobani which is called Ayn al-Arab. It took four months to be liberated, in spite of the attack of the alliance. Why? Actually, a similar city, the same size, and the same terrain, it took the Syrian Army two to three weeks. Why? Because it was supported logistically through Turkey on the border. They send them everything, armaments, all kinds of support. The recent event when Turkey-

Question 32: Did you support the Kurds? Did the Syrian Army support the Kurds?

President Assad: Of course.

Question 33: Because they are also fighting the Syrian Army.

President Assad: Before the issue of Kobani. Before that, we did. Before Kobani, we supported the Kurds, because it didn't start there. It started before, and before the alliance started supporting the Kurds, we did. We sent them armaments. Of course, they're going to say no, because the Americans said "say no, and we will help you." If they say yes, the Americans will be angry, just to be cautious, to take precautions about any statement they may say now that we didn't, we have all the documents about the armaments that's been sent to them, beside the air raids and so on and the bombardments and everything else.

Question 34: New Syrian troops are being trained in the framework of the "Free Syrian Army" supported by the Americans to fight against the Islamic State. Do you think you will have to fight them as well?

President Assad: You know, and I know, and everybody knows that those 5,000 were announced by the Americans, and this this is my proof that the Western officials don't have the will to fight terrorism. That is the proof. I told you, the base, the foundation, is to have the will. It means they don't have the will. If Obama said the moderate opposition is fantasy, so who do you send the money and armaments to? Reality. You don't send to the fantasy, you send it to the reality, and the reality are the extremists. And those 5,000 are going to be another support to those terrorists, because the same grassroots of the organization that's been supported by the West, by money and armaments, they joined ISIS with their armaments and with themselves.

Question 35: Two questions to finish this interview. This is your first interview with a journalist from a Portuguese-speaking country. Do you expect anything from these countries?

President Assad: I don't expect; I hope. I hope the first thing, which is very simple, just for the officials to tell their people the truth, the unbiased truth, without any preconceptions. Just tell your people the truth, and they'll be able to analyze it. Second, we hope from Portugal as part of the EU to look at the Czech Republic. A small country, ten millions, but it was very wise in dealing with the crisis in Syria. They have their embassy, they can tell what's going on on the ground, because isolationism is not a policy. When you isolate yourself, when you try to isolate a country by removing your ambassadors or closing your embassies, you isolate yourself from the reality. You shouldn't isolate yourself, as Europe, from reality. We hope can play that role in the EU to shift this trend that started with the American administration of Bush; when they have a problem with somebody or some area, instead of being more involved, they cut their relation with it. This is not policy.

Question 36: Just one last question, Mr. President. You're a key player for any possible peace deal. Don't you feel sometimes doubts, anguish, with this tremendous responsibility? Don't you feel what history might say about you?

President Assad: Of course, this is the most important thing that any politician or leader must think about, and it's about, first of all, about having good will and good intention to help your country. Whether you do mistakes or you do right, you do wrong; this is not the issue. People will judge you by your will, by how much you were related to your country, related to your country, how much you are a patriot, not a puppet or a marionette that's being moved from the outside. This is the most important thing; how much you do, what's the best you can do to protect your country and protect your people.

Question 37: Thank you, Mr. President, for this interview, and thank you for being with RTP.

President Assad: Thank you.

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