

# **“The Syrian Crisis Can Be Solved” President Bashar Al-Assad’s Interview with the Russian Media**

By [ITAR-TASS](#)

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[TASS Russian News Agency](#)

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*President Bashar al-Assad gave an interview to Russian media in which he hailed the Russian initiative for inter-Syrian dialogue as positive and denied any direct dialogue between Syria and the US, stressing that there has been no real change in the American or Western policies on Syria so far.*

The following is the full text of the interview:

Question 1: Thank you, Mr. President. I am Gregory from TASS News Agency. What is your assessment of the next round of Syrian-Syrian talks scheduled to be held in Moscow next April, and who will represent Syrian in these talks? In your opinion, what is the essential factor to ensure the success of Syrian-Syrian dialogue?

President Assad: Our assessment of this new round of talks, and of the Russian initiative in general, is very positive, because the initiative is important; and I can say that it is necessary. As you know the West, or a number of Western countries, have tried, during the Syrian crisis, to push towards a military war in Syria and the region sometimes under the title of fighting terrorism, and at other times under the title of supporting people who rose for freedom, and other lies which have been circulating in Western media.

The Russian initiative was positive because it emphasized the political solution, and consequently preempted the attempts of warmongers in the West, particularly in the United States, France, and Britain, as they have done in the Ukraine. You know that warmongers have been pushing towards arming different parties in Ukraine in order to change regimes, first in Ukraine, then in Russia. That’s why the principle behind this initiative is good and important. We have always believed and spoke publicly that every problem, however big, should have a political solution. This is in principle. However, its success depends very much on the substance genuinely reflecting the title which you have spoken about. The title is: a Syrian-Syrian dialogue. In order for this dialogue to succeed, it should be purely Syrian. In other words, there shouldn’t be any outside influence on the participants in this dialogue. The problem is that a number of the participants in the dialogue are supported by foreign Western and regional countries which influence their decisions. As you know, only a few days ago, one of these parties announced that they will not participate in the dialogue. They didn’t participate in the first round.

So, for this dialogue to succeed, the Syrian parties taking part in it should be independent and should express what the Syrian people, with all their political affiliations want. Then, the dialogue will succeed. That’s why the success of this initiative requires that other countries not interfere, as Moscow proposed in the first round; for the dialogue to be among the

Syrians with the Russians facilitating the dialogue among the Syrians without imposing any ideas on them. If things happen this way, I believe this dialogue will achieve positive results for stability in Syria.

Question 2: Abu Taleb al-Buhayya from RTV Arabic. Mr. President, within the framework of the steps taken to achieve a political solution, there is an initiative proposed by the UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura concerning a fighting freeze in Aleppo. After a number of meetings and trips, and there is information that some of de Mistura's staff in Damascus went to Aleppo, but in the end, there were statements made by some outside opposition factions which rejected this initiative. Nevertheless, there are safe neighborhoods in Aleppo which have come in recent days under a fierce attack and mortar shelling on safe neighborhoods. In general terms, Mr. President, how do you see the prospects of this initiative proposed by de Mistura and is it going to succeed in the coming days?

President Assad: Since the first meeting with Mr. de Mistura, we supported his ideas. And when we agreed with him on the basic elements of the initiative, which he announced later, Mr. de Mistura's team started working in Syria in order to implement this initiative. We continued our support and continued our discussions with him about the details of this initiative. In principle, the initiative is good because it deals with reality on the ground. It is similar to the reconciliation deals which have been achieved in Syria. The objective is to alleviate pressure and avert the dangers facing civilians specifically in the city of Aleppo, as a first stage for his mission. But de Mistura's initiative depends on more than one party. Obviously, it depends on the Syrian state's cooperation, as a major party to this initiative, including the state's institutions. But, on the other hand, it depends on the response of the terrorists or the armed groups who operate in different neighborhoods in Aleppo.

Another problem is similar to that concerning the Syrian-Syrian dialogue. Some of these armed groups are controlled by other countries. In the city of Aleppo in particular, all the armed groups or terrorist forces are supported directly by Turkey. That's why these forces, and from the beginning of de Mistura's initiative, declared that they refuse to cooperate with him and rejected the initiative altogether. They confirmed their rejection of the initiative about a week ago, and enforced their rejection by shelling civilians in the city of Aleppo and a large number of martyrs fell as a result. De Mistura's initiative is important in substance, and we believe that it is very realistic, and it has significant prospects of success if Turkey and the other countries supporting and funding the armed groups stop their interference. One of the most important factors of its success is that most Syrians want to get rid of the terrorists. Some of these terrorists will return to their normal lives or leave the neighborhoods in which civilians live, so that civilians can come back to these neighborhoods.

Question 3: Mr. President, on the political solution, the Syrian government took significant steps which have been applauded by Syria's friends and allies concerning national reconciliation attempts. These attempts have been successful, from what we hear from the Syrian population, and from our coverage in Damascus and other Syrian governorates. In general, Mr. President, what is your vision for the prospects of these national reconciliation attempts, whether in Damascus Countryside or in other governorates, particularly that we have been informed that the Syrian government released, a few days ago, over 600 prisoners, in order to ensure the success of national reconciliation?

President Assad: We started the national reconciliation endeavors over a year ago, or maybe two years ago. It is a parallel track to the political solution. As I said, every problem has a

political solution. But the political solution is usually long, and might be slow, and there might be obstacles which hinder the process or push it towards failure, although this failure might be temporary. But every day innocent people die in Syria, and we cannot wait for the political solution to materialize in order to protect people's lives. So, we have to move on other tracks. Of course, there is the track of fighting terrorists and eliminating them. But there has been a third track which consists of national reconciliation attempts. They include returning people to their neighborhoods, and for armed men leaving these neighborhoods, or remaining without their weapons in order for them to return to their normal lives.

In this case, the state offers amnesty to those and brings them back to their normal lives. Part of this process is releasing a number of prisoners. So, this is part of national reconciliation. What happened yesterday is part of this endeavor which has proved so far that it is the most important track. The truth is that national reconciliation in Syria has achieved great results, and led to the improvement of security conditions for many Syrian people in different parts of the country. So, what happened yesterday comes within this framework, and we will continue this policy which has proved successful until progress is achieved on the political track which we hope will be achieved in this consultative meeting in Moscow next April.

Question 4: Yevgeny Reshetnev from Russia 24. In the context of the civil war and armed conflict, some politicians made statements to the effect that your days as president were numbered, and some expected that you will no longer be there in a few months' time. But you have stood fast for a long time, and here we are sitting and talking with you. There are European politicians who say that the peaceful political solution in Syria will be without President Bashar al-Assad. In your opinion, how will it be possible to establish peace in Syria and to achieve reconciliation among the Syrians?

President Assad: The statements we have been hearing since the beginning of the crisis reflect the Western mentality, which is colonialist by nature. The West does not accept partners. If they don't like a certain state, they try to change it, or replace its president. When they use this reasoning, they do not see the people. As far as they're concerned, there is no people. They don't like the president, so they replace him. But when they made these statements, they based them on wrong assumptions. This way of thinking might have suited the past, but is not fit for this age. Today, people do not accept for their future or destiny or rulers to be decided by the outside world.

The same thing is happening now in Ukraine. And this is what they aim for in Russia. They don't like President Putin, so they demonize him. The same applies everywhere. However, I would like to stress that what determines these things in the end is the Syrian people. All the statements made by Western countries or their allies in the region about this issue did not concern us in the least. We do not care if they say the president will fall or remain in power, nor do we care whether they say that the president is legitimate or illegitimate. We derive our legitimacy from the people, and if there is any reason for the state's steadfastness in Syria, it is popular support. We shouldn't waste our time with European statements, because they are prepared to make statements which contradict each other from day to day.

The Syrian crisis can be solved. It's not impossible. If the Syrians sit and talk to each other, we will achieve results. We talked about national reconciliation, which is the most difficult thing: when two parties which used to carry guns and fight each other sit down and talk. This is much more difficult than sitting with those who are involved in political action. In the

first case there is blood, there is killing; nevertheless, we succeeded in this endeavor. We succeeded when we conducted these reconciliation attempts without foreign interference.

I say that for the Syrians to succeed, foreign intervention should stop. Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and some European countries should stop arming the terrorists. This was actually acknowledged publically by the French and by the British. They said they have been sending weapons to the terrorists. They should stop funding the terrorists, particularly Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Then, the political solution will be easy, and reconciliation with the armed groups will be easy, because the Syrian society supports reconciliation now and supports all these solutions. The Syrian society has not disintegrated as they expected. What is happening in Syria is not a civil war; in a civil war there should be lines separating the parties, either on ethnic, religious, or sectarian grounds. This doesn't exist in Syria. People still live with each other, but most people escape from the areas in which the terrorists operate to the safe areas controlled by the state. This is what we believe to be the foundation for reaching this solution. This is in addition to initiatives made by our friends like the consultative meeting which will be held in Moscow next month.

Question 5: Mr. President, in every state, in general, a pretext can be found to create sectarian or ethnic conflict, and Syria and the Ukraine are examples of that. How can we stop this?

President Assad: If you have in the beginning a sectarian problem which creates a division in society, it will be easy for other countries to manipulate this division and lead to unrest. You know that this is one of the things which some foreign countries have tried to manipulate, even in Russia, by supporting extremist groups which are conducting terrorist acts. Their objective is not to kill some innocent people. They rather aim at creating a division in Russian society which leads to weakening the country and the state and maybe dividing Russia itself. This is what they had in mind for Russia and this is what they had in mind for Syria. This is why I think there are many similarities.

So it has to be based on the state's performance before the crisis: preserving the unity of the homeland, religious freedom, freedom of belief. No group in any country should feel they are forbidden to exercise their religious rituals and hold their beliefs. This is the case in Syria; and this is one of the most important factors behind the steadfastness of Syrian society in facing this attack.

Nevertheless, the titles used at the beginning of the Syrian crisis by foreign media or by the terrorists called for dividing Syria, particularly along sectarian lines. Some people in Syria believed this propaganda in the beginning. But through the dialogue we conducted in the state, and by using different forms of awareness raising, particularly through the religious establishment, we were able to overcome this. People discovered quickly that this has nothing to do with sects or religions. They concluded that the problem is a form of terrorism supported by foreign countries. Here we succeeded and were able to overcome this very dangerous problem which you have suggested in your question.

Question 6: Mohammad Maarouf from Sputnik news agency. In the beginning, Mr. President, allow me on behalf of my colleagues at Sputnik news agency and Rossiya Segodnya to thank Your Excellency for availing us of this opportunity to meet you. Mr. President, you indicated previously that had you accepted what was offered to you before the crisis, you would have been the most favored and most democratic president in the region. Could you

please explain to us what you were offered at the time, and what is required by the West of Syria, for the West to stop arming the Syrian opposition and start the political solution?

President Assad: Let me go back to the Western mentality, which I described as colonialist. The West does not accept partners. It only wants satellite states. The United States does not even accept partners in the West. It wants Europe to follow the United States. They didn't accept Russia, although it was a superpower. They didn't accept it as a partner. Russian officials talk all the time about partnership with the West, and talk positively about the West. In return, the West does not accept Russia as a great power and as a partner on a global level. So, how could they accept a smaller state like Syria which could say no to them? When anything contradicts Syrian interests, we say no. And this is something they do not accept in the West. They asked us for a number of things in the past.

They used to put pressure on us to abandon our rights in our land occupied by Israel. They wanted us not to support the resistance in Lebanon or Palestine which defends the rights of the Palestinian people. At a later stage, a few years before the crisis, they put pressure on Syria to distance itself from Iran. In another case, some of them wanted to use Syria's relationship with Iran to influence the nuclear file. We have never been a part of this issue, but they wanted us to convince Iran to take steps against its national interests. We refused to do that. There were other similar things.

That's why they wanted in the end to make the Syrian state a satellite state which implements Western agendas in this region. We refused. Had we done these things, we would have become, as I said, a good, moderate, and democratic state. Now, they describe our state as being anti-democratic, while they have the best relations with the Saudi state which has nothing to do with democracy or elections and deprives women of their rights, in addition to many other things well known to the world. This is Western hypocrisy.

Question 7: So, what does the West require of Syria today in order to stop arming the Syrian opposition and start the political solution?

President Assad: Simply, to be a puppet. And I'm not convinced that the West has a political solution. They do not want a political solution. When I say the West, I mean a number of countries like the United States, France, and Britain. The other countries play a secondary role. For them, the political solution is changing the state, bringing the state down and replacing it with a client state, exactly like what happened in Ukraine. As far as they are concerned, what happened in Ukraine was a political solution. But, had the former president, who was elected by the people, remained, they would have said that this president is bad, dictatorial, and kills his people. It is the same propaganda. So, the West is not interested in a political solution. They want war, and they want to change states everywhere in the world.

Question 8: Mr. President, you are confirming that there were no American under-the-table requests from you?

President Assad: No, there has been nothing under the table.

Question 9: Konstantin Volkov from Rossiyskaya Gazeta. Mr. President, a few days ago, the U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, said in an interview with CNN television, I believe, that he is prepared to negotiate with the Syrian authorities. But other officials at the State Department contradicted these statements. Concerning U.S attempts to initiate negotiations with you, have there been any such attempts, and if so, what does Washington want?

President Assad: As for the American statements, or statements made by American officials, I think the world has become used to American officials saying something today, and saying the opposite the next day. We see this happening all the time. But there is another phenomenon which is for one official to say something and another official, in the same administration, saying the exact opposite. This is an expression of conflicts inside the American administration and also within the lobby groups working in the United States. These lobbies have different perceptions of different issues. We can say that the most important conflict today for Syria and Ukraine is between two camps: one which wants war and direct military intervention in Syria and Iraq. They might also talk about sending armies to Ukraine, through NATO, or sending arms to the subversive party within Ukraine. There is another camp which opposes intervention because it learned the lessons of previous wars.

As you know, from the Vietnam war to the Iraq war, the United States has never succeeded in any war. It succeeded in one thing, which is destroying the country. But in the end, it always came out defeated after having destroyed the country. But it seems that these groups are still in the minority. In any case, and despite these statements, so far we haven't seen any real change in American policies and it seems that the hardliners still define the direction of American policies in most parts of the world. As far as we in Syria are concerned, the policy is still going on. There is no direct dialogue between us and the Americans. There are ideas sent through third parties but they do not constitute a serious dialogue and we cannot take them seriously. We have to wait until we see a change in the American policy on the ground. Then we can say that there is a policy shift and clear demands. So far, the U.S. demands are what I described earlier concerning their wish to bring down the Syrian state and replace it with a client state which does their bidding.

Question 10: I am from Rossiya Segodnya. My question will be on the same subject and the same context. There are certain ideas which are being discussed in the West these days like having a peacekeeping force or a military force deployed on Syrian territories to fight ISIS. A number of 'hawks' in the U.S., whom you talked about suggested this. This might be just an idea, but today we see that there are airstrikes against ISIS. What is your opinion and assessment of the effectiveness of these airstrikes? And I would like to point out that these airstrikes may not only target ISIS, but positions of the Syrian Arab Army. Thank you.

President Assad: When you follow media reports on daily or weekly basis, you see that the rate of the airstrikes conducted by what they call a coalition against terrorism is sometimes less than ten strikes a day or a little more, in Syria or in Iraq, or in both Syria and Iraq. We are talking about a coalition which includes 60 countries, some of which are rich and advanced. On the other hand, the Syrian air force, which is very small in comparison to this coalition, conducts in a single day many times the number of the airstrikes conducted by a coalition which includes 60 countries.

Although you are not a military man, it is self evident that this doesn't make sense. This shows the lack of seriousness. Maybe some of these countries do not want ISIS to grow larger than it has become in Syria and Iraq, but at the same time they don't want to get rid of ISIS completely. They want to retain this terrorist force to be used as a threat to blackmail different countries. That's why we say simply that there is no serious effort to fight terrorism, and what is being achieved by the Syrian forces on the ground equals in one day what is being achieved by these states in weeks. Once again, this shows that these countries are not serious, not only militarily, but politically speaking. An anti-terrorist coalition cannot consist of countries which are themselves supporters of terrorism. So, there is a political side and a military side, and the two are linked to each other. The result is the

same: ISIS still exists. It is struck in one place but expands in another.

Question 11: I would like to check again about the positions of the Syrian Arab Army. Have they incurred any damage? And also about the peacekeeping force or a military presence in the area on your territories.

President Assad: No. No positions of the Syrian Army have been bombarded. What has been bombarded is infrastructure belonging to the Syrian people, and the results have been bad for us as a people and a state. But, as to deploying peacekeeping forces, such forces are usually deployed between warring states. So, when they talk about deploying peacekeeping forces in the fight against ISIS, this means that they recognize ISIS as a state, which is unacceptable and dangerous, particularly that terrorists, whether ISIS or al-Nusra, are terrorist organizations linked to al-Qaeda. These organizations infiltrate communities. Most of the communities and the areas are against these extremist and terrorist ideas. So, there is no state on the other side in order to deploy peacekeeping forces between two parties. This doesn't make sense.

Question 12: Igor Lutzman from Sputnik radio. Mr. President, when I talked to the Press Secretary of the President of the Chechen Republic, Alvi Karimov, he said that Mr. Ramzan Kadyrov shares your interpretation of the Quran, the basics of Islam, culture, and traditions. He tells young people that terrorists do not belong to any race or any religion. He warns Chechens that if they turn into terrorists and join the ranks of ISIS or other terrorist organizations, they will never be allowed to go back to the Chechen Republic. Can you please tell us how you deal with young people and how you explain to them that Islam is a religion of peace, as Mr. Kadyrov does?

President Assad: What is being done from a systematic perspective is correct and accurate. The problem is ideological in the first place. Some states deal with terrorism as if it were a gang operating somewhere and should be eliminated. This is a final solution. However, the real solution for terrorism is an intellectual and ideological one, and consequently the involvement of those responsible directly is essential and I support it.

Of course, this is not the first time we confront this ideology. We started confronting it since the early 1960s through our confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood who were the real predecessors of al-Qaeda in the Muslim world. The apex of these confrontations happened in the 1980s. At that time, we conducted an educational campaign and fought the Muslim Brotherhood ideologically by promoting the true Islam. But today, the situation is different, because in those days there was no internet, no social media, and no satellite TV stations. It was easy to control the cultural aspect of the problem. What we face today and what you face in your country, and most Muslim countries and the other countries which have Muslim communities, is the problem of extremist satellite TV stations which promote Wahhabi ideology and are funded by Wahhabi institutions and the Saudi state, which is allied to the Wahhabi establishment.

The same applies to the social media on the internet. That's why the danger we are facing now is tremendous and that's why we in Syria focused first of all on religious institutions which have played an important role by developing religious curricula and produced religious leaders who promote the real Islamic thought which is moderate and enlightened. We worked on satellite TV stations and established one which promotes moderate Islam and addresses not only the Muslim public but Muslim scholars as well. Religious leaders in Syria have also conducted different activities in the mosques and in their classes by

communicating with people and explaining the reality of what is happening.

Terrorism has nothing to do with religion. Whether we call it Islamic terrorism or give it any other name, it has nothing to do with religion. Terrorism is terrorism wherever it is; and Islam is a peaceful religion like any other heavenly religion. But unfortunately, we see many cases in Syria where some children or young people shift very quickly from a state of moderation to a state of extremism and terrorism. The reason is that moderate religion hasn't been enshrined in the families and the communities in which these young people live. That's why I believe this work is essential anywhere there is a Muslim community because they are targeted by Wahhabism and Wahhabi institutions.

Question 13: Fedor Ivanitsa from Izvestia newspaper. Mr. President, I would like to ask you about Syrian-Russian relations. Despite the difficult situation and the conflict in Syria, the supply and maintenance site for the Russian navy in Tartous is still functioning. Is there any idea to turn this site in the future into a full-fledged Russian naval military base? Have you received such a proposal, and if so are you studying it, and have there been new military contracts signed between Moscow and Damascus during the crisis?

President Assad: Concerning Russian presence in different parts of the world, including the Eastern Mediterranean and the Tartous port, it is necessary to create a sort of balance which the world lost after the disintegration of the Soviet Union more than 20 years ago. Part of this existence, as you said, is in Tartous port. As far as we are concerned, the stronger this presence is in our region, the better it is for the region's stability, because the Russian role is important for the stability of the world.

Of course, in this context I can say that we certainly welcome any expansion of the Russian presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and specifically on the Syrian shores and in Syrian ports for the same objectives I mentioned. But this of course depends on Russian political and military plans for the deployment of their forces in different regions and different seas and their plans for the expansion of these forces. If the Russian leadership intends to expand Russian presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and in Syria, we certainly welcome such expansion.

As to contracts and military cooperation between Syria and Russia, as you know, it is quite old and has been going on for more than six decades, and nothing will change, as far as this cooperation is concerned, in this crisis. There were Russian contracts with Syria signed before the crisis and which started to be implemented after the beginning of the crisis. There are also other new contracts on weapons and military cooperation signed during the crisis and their implementation is ongoing. The nature of these contracts has of course changed given the nature of the battles conducted by the Syrian armed forces in facing the terrorists. But in essence the nature of these relations has not changed and has continued as before.

Question 14: Mr. President, I have another question. I would like to touch on the disastrous humanitarian situation in Syria during the crisis. We watch on the news, and we ourselves write about this, that ethnic and religious minorities in Syria have been targeted or been subject to violations by the terrorist organization. Does the Syrian government have plans to move these minorities to other areas, to provide a new environment for these displaced people where they can live? There are larger numbers of people belonging to minorities running away from ISIS. What is the number of those who became displaced in and outside Syria fleeing from ISIS and other organizations?

President Assad: As for the first part of the question, as I said earlier, the terrorists and the propaganda which helped them used divisive, sectarian, and ethnic language. The objective was to push components of the Syrian society to emigrate and to realize the terrorist plan in making Syria an undiverse country. Whenever there's no diversity, there is always extremism.

In fact, the terrorists have not attacked minorities. They attack everybody in Syria, and the minorities have not been singled out in themselves, but this language has been necessary for them to create divisions within Syrian society. Now, if we do this, i.e. protect what are called minorities, it means that we are doing what the terrorists want. The Syrian state must be a state for all Syrian citizens, taking care of all, and defending all. This is what the Syrian Arab Army should do. That's why I believe there should be only one plan which is protecting the homeland and protecting the Syrian people. When you protect the people, it is no longer important whether there are minorities or majorities in the Syrian people, because the people are one unit and all of them are targeted.

On the number of the displaced, there are no accurate statistics, and the figure changes every day. There are many people who leave certain areas and move to other areas where they have relatives. These people are not registered as displaced people. Of course the number inside and outside Syria is several millions, but it is greatly exaggerated in foreign media to be used to justify military intervention under a humanitarian slogan. What's more important is that the Syrian state is providing care to all those who do not have a home. There are shelters for these displaced people, they are provided with medical care, food, and education for their children. Of course these things cannot be at the same level that they were used to in their lives before, but this is a temporary stage until their areas are freed from terrorists and they're returned to their areas.

Question 15: Mr. President, how do you see Syrian-Arab relations when there are indications of closer Syrian-Egyptian relations and general coordination between Syria and Iraq? What is your position towards the Arab Summit being held without Syria's participation?

President Assad: Arab Summits, at least since I attended the first one, have not achieved anything in the Arab world. This has to do with inter-Arab relations, because the Arab League consists of Arab states, some of which implement the Western agenda and hinder any progress in the work of the Arab League. Other countries do not play any role. They are neutral. A small number of these countries try to play a role. For example, when there was a vote in the Arab League to ask the Security Council to facilitate or conduct military action in Libya, Syria was the only country which objected. This was before the crisis, and was one of the reasons which made other Arab countries, which are in the Western sphere of influence, start an incitement campaign against Syria and push the problems, or the crisis, in this direction from the very beginning. That's why inter-Arab relations are now subject to the desires of inter-Western relations. They are not independent. They are non-existent on the inter-Arab level and equally non-existent on the Syrian-Arab level.

As to our relation with Egypt, Egypt suffered from the same terrorism from which Syria suffered, but in a different way. It suffered from the attempts of Arab countries to interfere and fund terrorist forces, but of course to a much lesser degree than what happened in Syria. But there is a great degree of awareness in Egypt in general, on the level of the Egyptian state and people, of what happened in Syria recently. There is a relation but in a very limited framework between the two states, practically on the level of the security services. But we do not talk about real relations or about having closer ties unless there is a

direct meeting between the concerned political institutions in the two countries. This hasn't happened so far, and we hope to see a closer Syrian-Egyptian relation soon because of the importance of Syrian-Egyptian relations for the Arab condition in general. Relations with Iraq are good of course, and we coordinate with Iraq because we have the same terrorist arena.

Question 16: Mr. President, in a number of reports for RT, we said that after things settled down in Damascus, this year will be a year of great changes. After a number of foreign parliamentary and political delegations visited Syria, what is your reading of the near future, politically and militarily, particularly after your meetings with these delegations?

President Assad: The delegations which visited Syria recently, some publically and others secretly, express two things: first, they show the lack of credibility of the media campaign in the West towards what is happening in the region. Repeating the same lies for four years cannot continue because it is no longer convincing. Realities on the ground are changing, and there are things which we in Syria used to say from the beginning of the crisis which have proved to Western people to be true.

When we used to talk about the spread of terrorism, they used to say there was no terrorism. The delegations which visit Syria include journalists, civil society organizations, and parliamentarians. They wanted to come to Syria in order to know what is going on. On the other hand, there is something related to the states. More than one Western official we met told us that Western officials climbed the tree and are no longer capable of coming down. We have to help them come down through these meetings. They have lied a great deal to us for four years, and now they are saying the exact opposite. It won't be possible for these politicians to say the opposite and say the truth, because they will end politically. That's why they send delegations, and when the delegations return, they attack them, saying that they were private visits and have nothing to do with the state.

Despite the fact that these delegations include parliamentarians, but they include people who represent the executive authority, whether in the intelligence services, the ministries of defense, or the like. This shows that the Western countries still persist in their lies but they want a way out and do not know how to get out of the dilemma they have got themselves into.

Question 17: Once again, Mr. President, it's Rossiyskaya Gazeta. The Syrian crisis has been going on for four years. I believe it has been a difficult experience for you as a leader of this state in order to help the state itself survive. Could you please tell me about this new experience you have acquired during this difficult period. What are the things you concluded concerning foreign relations, for instance? What are the principles you adopt in leading the state?

President Assad: It is self evident that the role of any state is to work for the interests of the people and the interests of the country. It is only normal that its role should be to act in order to achieve these interests. The conflict for the past decades, including this crisis, is actually linked to what is happening in Ukraine, first because Syria and Ukraine concern Russia, and second because the objective is clear: weakening Russia. The objective is to create client states. When the task of the state or the official is to work for the interests of the people, it is self evident that this should be the guiding principle in managing domestic and foreign policies. This requires continued dialogue between officials and the population, all the officials and all the population. It's normal to have different viewpoints in every country, but ultimately there should be one general line which identifies the public policy of

the state. In that case, even if there were mistakes, and even if there was some deviation, the people will support you in such crises because your intentions are good and because you do not implement the policies of other countries. You implement the policies of this people, a little better, a little worse, this is the nature of things.

This is why I say that what we have succeeded in doing during these four years is that we haven't paid attention to the Western campaign, haven't cared about Western statements. We have cared a great deal about what the different sections of the Syrian people think, particularly when there was an intellectual polarization in Syria, between those who support the state, those who oppose it, and those in the middle.

Many people now support the state after they discovered the truth, not because they support the state politically – they might have great differences with the state in terms of political, economic, cultural, and foreign policies – but they are convinced that this is a patriotic state which acts in the best interest of the people, and that if they want to change these policies, it should happen through constitutional and legal ways. This is what we have succeeded in doing, and this is what has protected our country. Had we gone in any other direction, we would have failed from the early months of the crisis, and what they proposed in terms of the state and the president would fall, would have been true, because they believed that we would move away from people and follow our own way, and this is what we haven't done.

Question 18: With your permission, I have another question from Russia 24 TV channel. You talked about foreign attempts to change regimes in a number of countries, and there are moves and acts on the part of Western or foreign intelligence agencies to overthrow certain regimes. Did they try something like this with you before the crisis?

President Assad: Of course, and for decades. At least these attempts have not stopped for the past five decades. They used to have two trends: sometimes changing the state, and when these attempts fail, and they always do, they used to move in another direction which is weakening the state from within, and sometimes from the outside, through sanctions, in the same way they are behaving towards Russia now.

The sanctions against Russia aim at weakening Russia from the inside. We also have been subject to sanctions for decades, like Cuba, and they also failed. There have been other attempts through people inside the country, people who belong in their minds and aspirations to the West, not to the country. They admire the West and have an inferiority complex towards it, and that's why they implement its agendas.

There was another method used through the Muslim Brotherhood, for instance. The organization was created in Egypt at the beginning of the last century with British support, not Egyptian support. The British created it in order to make it one of the tools used to destroy Egypt when Britain needs it. Of course, the organization spread to other Arab countries, including Syria. These methods will not stop as long as the West continues to think in a colonialist manner, and as long as there are states which speak the national language and do not accept foreign intervention. These countries include Russia, Syria, Iran, and many other countries in the world. They will continue to try, and I think they will not stop, because that is the logic of history: there are countries which want to dominate and control other countries, if not through war, then through the economy, and if not through the economy, then through creating problems and blackmail.

Journalists: Thank you, Mr. President.

President Assad: Thank you very much for visiting us in these circumstances, and I hope that this discussion has been useful to you and to your Russian audiences. When we talk to the Russians, we know that they know exactly what is happening in Syria, because what is happening in Syria and Russia is similar. And of course there are historical relations and Syrian-Russian families. I hope to see again you under different circumstances. Thank you.

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