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Bashar Al Assad Interview: Western Nations are Supporting the Terrorists. US Counter-Terrorism Campaign is Bogus

They "Attack the Syrian Government Openly and Deal with It Secretly " Interview with the Australian SBS TV channel

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President Bashar al-Assad gave an interview to the Australian SBS TV channel in which he criticized the double standards of the West- openly attacking the Syrian government politically, but continuing to deal with it through back channels-calling for a more humanitarian and less costly solution to refugee crisis through stopping support to the terrorists.

The following is the full text of the interview:

Journalist: Mr. President, thank you for speaking with SBS Australia.

President Assad: You're most welcome in Syria.

Question 1: It's now more than five years since the Syrian crisis began. It's estimated somewhere around a quarter of a million people have been killed, many of them civilians. There's an undeniable humanitarian disaster. How far into the crisis do you think you are, and is there an end in sight?

President Assad: Of course, there is an end in sight, and the solution is very clear. It's simple yet impossible. It's simple because the solution is very clear, how to make dialogue between the Syrians about the political process, but at the same time fighting the terrorism and the terrorists in Syria. Without fighting terrorists, you cannot have any real solution. It's impossible because the countries that supported those terrorists, whether Western or regional like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, don't want to stop sending all kinds of support to those terrorists. So, if we start with stopping this logistical support, and as Syrians go to dialogue, talk about the constitution, about the future of Syria, about the future of the political system, the solution is very near, not far from reach.



Question 2: Much of the reporting in the West at the moment suggests that the demise of the Islamic State is imminent. Do you believe that's true, and how far away from seizing Raqqa, this very important city of Raqqa, do you believe you are?

President Assad: It's not a race. Raqqa is as important as Aleppo, as Damascus, as any other city. The danger of those terrorist groups is not about what land do they occupy, because it's not a traditional war. It's about how much of their ideology can they instill in the mind of the people in the area that they sit or live in. Indoctrination, this is the most dangerous thing. So, reaching Raqqa is not that difficult militarily, let's say. It's a matter of time. We are going in that direction. But the question when you talk about war is about what the other side, let's say the enemy, could do, and that's directly related to the effort of Turkey, especially Erdogan, in supporting those groups, because that's what's happening since the beginning. If you talk about Syria as an isolated military field, you can reach that area within a few months or a few weeks, let's say, but without taking into consideration the Turkish effort in supporting the terrorists, any answer would be a far cry from the reality, an un-factual answer.

Question 3: Mr. President, how concerned are you about recent fatal clashes which have been reported between your longtime ally Hezbollah and your own forces?

There is good Syrian-Russian-Iranian coordination on fighting terrorism

President Assad: Fighting between us and Hezbollah? They are not fighting. They support the Syrian Army. They don't fight against the Syrian Army, they fight with the Syrian Army. The Syrian Army and Hezbollah, with the support of the Russian Air Forces, we are fighting all kinds of terrorist groups, whether ISIS or al-Nusra or other affiliated groups with Al Qaeda that's affiliated automatically to al-Nusra and ISIS.

Question 4: So, there have been some recent reports of clashes between… are those reports incorrect.

President Assad: No, they are talking not about clashes; about, let's say, differences and different opinions. That's not true, and if you look at the meeting that happened recently between the Ministers of Defense in Iran, in Tehran; Syrian, Russian, and Iranian, this means there's good coordination regarding fighting terrorism.

Question 5: To be clear, do you categorize all opposition groups as terrorists?

President Assad: Definitely not, no. When you talk about an opposition group that adopts the political means, they're not terrorists. Whenever you hold machineguns or any other

armaments and you terrorize people and you attack civilians and you attack public and private properties, you are a terrorist. But if you talk about opposition, when you talk about opposition it must be the Syrian opposition. It cannot be a surrogate opposition that works as a proxy to other countries like Saudi Arabia or any other country. It must be a Syrian opposition that's related to its Syrian grassroots, like in your country. It's the same, I think.

Question 6: You said recently that the ceasefire offered Syrian people at least a glimmer of hope. How, five months on, do you think that hope is going?

President Assad: Yeah, it is. It's still working, the ceasefire, but we don't have to forget that terrorist groups violate this agreement, on a daily basis. But at the same time, we have the right, according to that agreement, to retaliate whenever the terrorists attack our government forces. So, actually you can say it's still working in most of the areas, but in some areas it's not.

Question 7: There are various accounts of how the Syrian crisis began. Some say it was children graffiting anti-government slogans and they were dealt with brutally by the government. I understand you don't accept that narrative. How, in your view, did the crisis begin?

President Assad: It's a mixture of many things. Some people demonstrated because they needed reform. We cannot deny this, we cannot say "no everybody was a terrorist" or "everyone was a mercenary." But the majority of those demonstrators – I'm not talking about the genuine demonstrators – were paid by Qatar in order to demonstrate, then later they were paid by Qatar in order to revolt with armaments, and that's how it started, actually. The story of children being attacked, this is an illusive story. It didn't happen. Of course, you always have, let's say, mistakes happening in the practice on the ground, like what happened in the United States recently, during the last year, but this is not a reason for people to hold machineguns and kill policemen and soldiers and so on.

Question 8: You do say that some of these people legitimately needed reform. Was that as a result of any heavy-handedness from your government at all?

President Assad: No, we had reform in Syria. It started mainly after 2000, in the year 2000. Some people think it was slow, some people think it was too fast, this is subjective, not objective, but we were moving in that regard. But the proof that it wasn't about the reform, because we made all the requested reforms after the crisis started five years ago, and nothing has changed. So, it wasn't about reform. We changed the constitution, we changed the laws that the opposition asked for, we changed many things, but nothing happened. So, it wasn't about the reform; it was about money coming from Qatar, and most of the people that genuinely asked for reform at the beginning of the crisis, they don't demonstrate now, they don't go against the government, they cooperate with the government. They don't believe, let's say, in the political line of this government, and this is their right and that's natural, but they don't work against the government or against the state institutions. So, they distinguish themselves from the people who supported the terrorists.



Question 9: How do you respond to the fact that some of your ministers defected and cited brutality as reason?

President Assad: Actually, they defected because they've been asked to do so by, some of them, Saudi Arabia, some of them by France, it depends on the country they belong to. And now, they are belonging to that so-called opposition that belongs to those countries, not to the Syrians. They have no values in Syria, so we wouldn't worry about that. It didn't change anything. I mean it didn't affect the fact or the reality in Syria.

Question 10: One of your main backers, Russia, has called for a return to the peace talks. Do you think that's a good idea?

President Assad: You mean in Geneva?

Journalist: Yes.

Geneva negotiations need to have the basic principles in order to be fruitful

President Assad: Yeah, of course, we support every talk with every Syrian party, but in reality those talks haven't been started yet, and there's no Syrian-Syrian talks till this moment, because we only made negotiations with the facilitator, which is Mr. de Mistura. Actually, it hasn't started. So, we support the principle, but in practice you need to have a certain methodology that didn't exist so far. So, we need to start, but we need to have the basic principles for those negotiations to be fruitful.

Question 11: One thing that intrigues a lot of people about the Syrian crisis is why your close allies Iran and Russia stay so loyal?

By defending Syria, allies are defending their stability and interests

President Assad: Because it wasn't about the President, it's not about the person. This is the misinterpretation, or let's say the misconception in the West, and maybe part of the propaganda, that Russia and Iran supported Assad, or supported the President. It's not like this. It's about the whole situation. The chaos in Syria is going to provoke a domino effect in our region, that's going to affect the neighboring countries, it's going to affect Iran, it's going to affect Russia, it's going to affect Europe, actually. So, when they defend Syria, they defend the stability and they defend their stability, they defend their interest. And at the same time, it's about the principle. They defend the Syrian people and their right to protect themselves. Because if they defend the President and the Syrian people are not with him and don't support him, I cannot withstand five years just because Russia and Iran support me. So, it's not about the President, it's about the whole situation, the bigger picture, let's say.

Question 12: Do you have any dialogue either direct or indirectly with the United States?

Western countries are dealing with Syria through back channels

President Assad: At all, nothing at all. Indirect, yes, indirect, through different channels. But if you ask them they will deny it, and we're going to deny it. But in reality, it exists; the back channels.

Question 13: What are some of those channels?

President Assad: I mean, let's say, businessmen going and traveling around the world and meeting with the officials in the United States and in Europe, they meet in Europe, and they try to convey certain messages, but there's nothing serious, because we don't think the administration, the American administration, is serious about solving the problem in Syria.

Question 14: Well, quite recently, there were reports more than 50 diplomats have called for what they described as "real and effective military strikes" against you, against Syria. Does this in any way concern you, and do you think it signals a more aggressive policy from the United States towards Syria moving forward?

American administrations are famous of creating problems, but they never solve any

President Assad: No, warmongers in every American administration always exist. It's not something new. But we wouldn't give a fig, let's say, about this communique, but it's not about this communique; it's about the policy, it's about the actions. The difference between this administration and the previous one, Bush's one, is that Bush sent his troops. This one is sending mercenaries, and turned a blind eye to what Saudi Arabia and Turkey and Qatar did, since the beginning of the crisis. So, it's the same policy. It's a militaristic policy, but in different ways. So, this communique is not different from the reality on the ground. This is asking for war, and the reality is a war.

Question 15: You referred to the previous government, the Bush government. There are some who say one of the reasons you've survived as long as a government has been America's reluctance to get on the ground in another war in the Middle East. Do you not accept that, based on what you're saying?

President Assad: Yeah, the American administrations since the 50s are very famous of creating problems but they never solve any problems, and that's what happened in Iraq. Bush invaded Iraq, in a few weeks he could occupy Iraq, but then what's next? It's not about occupying. This is a great power. We're not a great power. So, it's not about America occupying Syria. What's next? What do they want to achieve? They haven't achieved anything. They failed in Libya, in Iraq, in Yemen, in Syria, everywhere. They only created chaos. So, if the United States wants to create more chaos it can, it can create chaos, but can they solve the problem? No.

Question 16: Do you have a preference who wins the upcoming US election?

President Assad: Actually no, we never bet on any American president, because usually what they say in the campaign is different from their practice after they become president, and Obama is an example, so we don't have to wait. We have to wait and see what policy they're going to adopt, whoever wins the elections.

Question 17: So, you can see a circumstance where Syria would work collaboratively with the United States and the West?

We are not against cooperation with the US based on mutual interest

President Assad: We don't have a problem with the United States, they're not our enemy, they don't occupy our land. We have differences, and those differences go back to the 70s and maybe before that, but in many different times, let's say, and events and circumstances, we had cooperation with the United States. So, we're not against this cooperation. But, this cooperation means talking about and discussing and working for the mutual interest, not for their interest at the expense of our interest. So, we don't have a problem.



Question 18: Mr. President, you've spent a lot of time yourself, as you've just said, in the United Kingdom. Can you see there being any repercussions for Britain's decision to exit the European Union for Syria and for the Syrian crisis?

British people are revolting against their "second-tier" and "disconnected" politicians

President Assad: I don't think I can elaborate about that, as it's a British issue, and I'm not British neither European. But at the same time I can say that this surprising result, maybe, has many different components, whether internal as economic and external as the worry from the terrorism, security issues, refugees, and so on. But this is an indication for us, as those officials who used to give me the advice about how to deal with the crisis in Syria, and say "Assad must go" and "he's disconnected" proven to be disconnected from reality, otherwise they wouldn't have asked for this referendum, but I think this is a revolt of the people there against, I would call them sometimes second-tier politicians. They needed special, let's say, statecraft officials, to deal their country. If another administration came and understands that the issue of refugees and security is related to the problem in our region, this is where you're going to have a different policy that will affect us positively. But I don't have now a lot of hope about this. Let's say we have a slim hope, because we don't know who's going to come after Cameron in the UK.

Question 19: Can I ask; Australia is part of the international coalition to defeat the Islamic State. Obviously, that's one of your goals, so in that instance there's a shared goal. Do you welcome international intervention when there's a shared goal like that.

President Assad: Actually, we welcome any effort to fight terrorism in Syria, any effort, but this effort first of all should be genuine, not window-dressing like what's happening now in northern Syria where 60 countries couldn't prevent ISIS from expanding. Actually, when the Russian air support started, only at that time when ISIS stopped expanding. So, it needs to be genuine. Second, it needs to be through the Syrian legitimate government, not just because they want to fight terrorism and they can go anywhere in the world. We are a

legitimate government and we are a sovereign country. So, only on these two circumstances we welcome any foreign support to fight terrorism.

Question 20: A number of Australians have died fighting for either the Kurdish militia or the Islamic State. Do you have a message for these young people who feel so enraged by what's taking place in Syria that they travel over here to fight?

President Assad: Again, the same, let's say, answer. If there are foreigners coming without the permission of the government, they are illegal, whether they want to fight terrorists or want to fight any other one. It is the same. It's illegal, we can call it.

Question 21: Mr. President, Australian politicians have used very strong language about your role in the crisis, as have other leaders, internationally. Australia's Prime Minister has referred to you as a "murderous tyrant," saying that you're responsible for killing thousands of innocent civilians. Australia's opposition leader has called you a "butcher." Yet Australia's official position is still to work with you toward a peace agreement. How do you reconcile those two very different positions?

Western nations attack Syrian government and yet deal with it under the table

President Assad: Actually, this is the double standard of the West in general. They attack us politically and they send us their officials to deal with us under the table, especially the security, including your government. They all do the same. They don't want to upset the United States. Actually, most of the Western officials only repeat what the United States wants them to say. This is the reality. So, I think these statements, I just can say they are disconnected from our reality, because I'm fighting terrorists, our army is fighting terrorists, our government is against terrorists, the whole institutions are against terrorists. If you call fighting terrorism butchery, that's another issue.

Question 22: Australia has agreed to take an additional twelve thousand Syrian refugees; some have already arrived. Do you have a message for these Syrians, many of whom still say they love Syria and they want to return. Do you have a message for those people, as I said, who are in Australia, and other countries around the world?

A more humanitarian and less costly European solution to refugee crisis is stopping support to terrorists

President Assad: Actually, you mentioned a very important point. Most of the refugees that left Syria, they want to come back to Syria. So, any country that helped them enter their new country, let's say, their new homeland, is welcome as a humanitarian action, but again there is something more humanitarian and less costly: is to help them staying in their country, help them going back by helping the stability in Syria, not to give any umbrella or support to the terrorists. That's what they want. They want the Western governments to take decisive decisions against what Saudi Arabia and other Western countries, like France and UK, are doing in order to support the terrorists in Syria just to topple the government. Otherwise, those Syrians wouldn't have left Syria. Most of them, they didn't leave because they are against the government or with the government; they left because it's very difficult to live in Syria these days.



Question 23: Do you hope that these people will return and would you facilitate for them to return?

President Assad: Definitely, I mean losing people as refugees is like losing human resources. How can you build a country without human resources? Most of those people are educated, well trained, they have their own businesses in Syria in different domains. You lose all this, of course, we need.

Question 24: The Commission for International Justice and Accountability says there are thousands of government documents which say has proved your government sanctioned mass torture and killings. In the face of that evidence, how do you say that no crimes have taken place, and I point also to other independent organizations, which are critical of deliberate targeting hospitals. Do you concede that some mistakes have been made as you've targeted some rebel-held areas?

President Assad: You are talking about two different things. One of them, the first one is the reports. The most important report that's been financed by Qatar, just to defame the Syrian government, and they have no proof, who took the pictures, who are the victims in those pictures, and so on. Like you can forge anything if you want now on the computer. So, it is not credible at all. Second, talking about attacking hospitals or attacking civilians, the question, the very simple question is: why do we attack hospitals and civilians? I mean the whole issue, the whole problem in Syria started when those terrorists wanted to win the hearts of the Syrians. So, attacking hospitals or attacking civilians is playing into the hands of the terrorists. So, if we put the values aside now for a while, let's talk about the interests. No government in this situation has any interest in killing civilians or attacking hospitals. Anyway, if you attack hospitals, you can use any building to be a hospital. No, these are an anecdotal claims, mendacious statements I can say; they are not credible at all. We're still sending vaccines to those areas under the control of the terrorists. So, how can I send vaccines and attack the hospitals? This is a contradiction.

Question 25: Mr. President, as a father and as a man, has there been one anecdote, one story, one image from the crisis, which has affected you personally more than others?

President Assad: Definitely, we are humans, and I am Syrian like the other Syrians. I will be more sympathetic with any Syrian tragedy affecting any person or family, and in this region, we are very emotional people, generally. But as an official, I am not only a person, I am an official. As an official, the first question you ask when you have that feeling is what are you going to do, what are you going to do to protect other Syrians from the same suffering? That's the most important thing. So, I mean, this feeling, this sad feeling, this painful feeling, is an incentive for me to do more. It's not only a feeling.

Question 26: What's your vision for Syria? How do you see things in two to three years?

President Assad: After the crisis or…? Because, the first thing we would like to see is to have Syria stable as it used to be before, because it was one of the most stable countries and secure countries around the world, not only in our region. So, this the first thing. If you have this, you can have other ambitions. Without it you cannot. I mean, if you have this, the other question: how to deal with the new generation that lived the life of killing, that saw the extremism or learned the extremism or indoctrinated by Al Qaeda-affiliated groups, and so on. This is another challenge. The third one is bringing back those human resources that left as refugees in order to rebuild Syria. Rebuilding the country as buildings or infrastructure is very easy; we are capable of doing this as Syrians. The challenge is about the new generation.

Question 27: How do you think history will reflect on your presidency?

President Assad: What I wish is to say that this is the one who saved his country from the terrorists and from the external intervention. That is what I wish about it. Anything else would be left to the judgment of the Syrian people, but this is my only wish.

Journalist: Mr. President, Thank you very much for speaking with SBS Australia.

President Assad: Thank you very much.

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