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President Al-Assad Interview: The Priority is to Fight ISIS, Al-Nusra and Al Qaeda Linked Organizations

The Turks, Qataris and Saudis Lost Most of Their Cards and Are Now Left with Aleppo Battle Card

Par DR Bachar al-Assad
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President Bashar al-Assad gave interview to Cuba's official state news agency Prensa Latina in which he said the Turks, Qataris and Saudis lost most of their cards on the battlefields in Syria and that Aleppo battle is their last card, affirming that there is strong harmony between Syria and Latin America, especially Cuba, on the political and historical levels and that hard work is needed in order to invigorate the different sectors of this relation.

The following is the full text of the interview:

Question 1: Mr. President, thanks for giving Prensa Latina this historic opportunity of conveying your point of view to the rest of the world about the reality in Syria, because as you know, there is a lot of misinformation out there about your country, about the foreign aggression that is taking place against this beautiful country.

Mr. President, how would you evaluate the current military situation of the external aggression against Syria, and what are the main challenges of Syrian forces on the ground to fight anti-government groups? If it is possible, we would like to know your opinion about the battles or combats in Aleppo, in Homs.

Aleppo battle is the last card for the Turks, Qataris and Saudis

President Assad: Of course, there was a lot of support to the terrorists from around the world. We have more than one hundred nationalities participating in the aggression against Syria with the support of certain countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar with their money and Turkey with the logistical support, and of course with the endorsement and supervision of the Western countries, mainly the United States, France, and the UK, and some other allies. But since the Russians decided to intervene in supporting legally the Syrian Army in fighting the terrorists in Syria, mainly al-Nusra and ISIS and some other affiliated groups, the scales have been tipped against those terrorists, and the Syrian Army has made many advances in different areas in Syria. And we are still moving forward, and the Syrian Army is determined to destroy and to defeat those terrorists. You mentioned Homs and Aleppo. Of course, the situation in Homs, since the terrorists left Homs more than a year ago, the situation has been much, much better, more stable. You have some suburbs of the city which were infiltrated by terrorists. Now there is a process of reconciliation in those areas in which

either the terrorists give up their armaments and go back to their normal life with amnesty from the government, or they can leave Homs to any other place within Syria, like what happened more than a year ago in the center of the city.

For Aleppo it is a different situation, because the Turks and their allies like the Saudis and Qataris lost most of their cards on the battlefields in Syria, so the last card for them, especially for Erdogan, is Aleppo. That is why he worked hard with the Saudis to send as much as they can of the terrorists – the estimation is more than 5,000 terrorists – to Aleppo.



Question 2: Through the Turkish borders?

President Assad: Yes, from Turkey to Aleppo, during the last two months, in order to recapture the city of Aleppo, and that didn't work. Actually, our army has been making advancement in Aleppo and the suburbs of Aleppo in order to encircle the terrorists, then, let's say, either to negotiate their going back to their normal life as part of reconciliation, or for the terrorists to leave the city of Aleppo, or to be defeated. There's no other solution.

Question 3: Thank you, thank you very much. Mr. President, which are the priorities of the Syrian Army in the confrontation with the terrorist groups? And we're particularly interested, because in Cuba we had something similar in the past, in the role of the popular defense groups; what is the role that the popular defense groups are playing in the theater of operations?

Syrian army's priority is to fight al-Qaeda-linked organizations of ISIS, al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Cham and Jaish al-Islam

President Assad: The priority of the Syrian Army, first of all, is to fight ISIS and al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Cham and Jaish al-Islam. These four organizations are directly linked to Al Qaeda through the ideology; they have the same ideology, they are Islamic extremist groups who want to kill anyone who doesn't look or doesn't feel or behave like them. But regarding what you called the popular militia groups, actually, at the beginning of the war, the terrorists started an unconventional war against our army, and our army is a traditional army, like any other army in the world, so the support of those popular defence groups was very important in order to defeat the terrorists in an unconventional way. That was very helpful to the Syrian Army, because those fighters, those national fighters, they fight in their regions, in their cities, in their villages, so they know the area very well, they know the region very well, I mean the pathways, the terrain, let's say, very well. So, they can be very huge assets for the Syrian Army. That is their role.

Question 4: Mr. President, how does the resistance of the Syrian people take place in the economic front to foreign aggression, I mean the economy, and please, what is your opinion on which sectors of the Syrian economy have remained functioning despite the war, economic blockade, looting, and so forth?

President Assad: Actually, the war on Syria is a full-blown war; it is not only supporting terrorists. They support the terrorists, and at the same time they launched a political war against Syria on the international level, and the third front was the economic front, in which they dictate to their terrorists, to their surrogate mercenaries, to start destroying the infrastructure in Syria that helped the economy and the daily needs of the Syrian citizens.

At the same time, they started an embargo directly on the borders of Syria through the terrorists and abroad through the banking systems around the world. In spite of that, the Syrian people were determined to live as much normal life as they can. That prompted many Syrian businessmen or the owners of, let's say, the industry, which is mainly medium and small industry, to move from the conflict areas and unstable areas toward more stable areas, on a smaller scale of business, in order to survive and to keep the economy running and to keep the needs of the Syrian people available. So, in that regard, most of the sectors are still working. For example, the pharmaceutical sector is still working in more than 60% of its capacity, which is very important, helpful, and very supportive to our economy in such circumstances. And I think now we are doing our best in order to re-expand the base of the economy in spite of the situation, especially after the Syrian Army made many advancements in different areas.

Question 5: Mr. President, let's talk a little bit about the international environment, please give me your opinion about the role of the United Nations in the Syrian conflict, the attempts of Washington and its allies to impose their will on the Security Council and in the Geneva peace talks.

So far, there is no UN role in the Syrian conflict; there is only Russian and American dialogue

President Assad: Talking about the role of the United Nations or Security Council could be illusive, because actually the United Nations is now an American arm, where they can use it the way they want, they can impose their double standards on it instead of the Charter. They can use it like any other institution within the American administration. Without some Russian and Chinese stances in certain issues, it would be a full American institution. So, the Russian and Chinese role has made some balance within these institutions, mainly regarding the Syrian issue during the last five years. But if you want to talk about their role through their mediators or their envoys, like recently de Mistura, and before that Kofi Annan, and in between Brahimi, and so on. Let's say that those mediators are not independent; they reflect either the pressure from the Western countries, or sometimes the dialogue between the main powers, mainly Russia and the United States. So, they're not independent, so you cannot talk about the role of the United Nations; it is a reflection of that balance. That is why so far, there is no United Nations role in the Syrian conflict; there is only Russian and American dialogue, and we know that the Russians are working hard and seriously and genuinely in order to defeat the terrorists, while the Americans always play games in order to use the terrorists, not to defeat them.

Question 6: Mr. President, how do you see at the present time the coexistence among Syrian ethnic and religious groups against this foreign intervention? How do they contribute or not in this regard?

President Assad: The most important thing about this harmony between the different spectrums of the Syrian fabric, is that it is genuine, because that has been built up through the history, through centuries, so for such a conflict, it cannot destroy that social fabric. That is why if you go around and visit different areas under the control of the government, you will see all the colors of the Syrian society living with each other.

Intervention: I saw it in Damascus.

President Assad: Exactly. And I would say, I would add to this, that during the conflict, this harmony has become much better and stronger, and this is not rhetoric; actually, this is reality, for different reasons, because this conflict is a lesson. This diversity that you have, it is either to be a richness to your country, or a problem. There's no something in the middle. So, the people learned that we need to work more on this harmony, because the first rhetoric used by the terrorists and by their allies in the region and in the West regarding the Syrian conflict at the very beginning was sectarian rhetoric. They wanted people to divide in order to have conflict with each other, to stoke the fire within Syria, and it didn't work. And the Syrians learned that lesson, that we had harmony; we had had harmony before the conflict, in the normal times, but we have to work more in order to make it much stronger.

So, I can say without any exaggeration that the situation regarding this part is good. In spite of that, I would say the areas under the control of the terrorists – and as you know those terrorists are mainly extremist groups affiliated to Al Qaeda – in which they worked very hard in order to indoctrinate the young generation with their dark ideology, and they succeeded in some areas, this dark ideology with the killing and beheading and all these horrible practices. With the time, it is going to be more difficult to deal with this new generation of young people who have been indoctrinated with Al Qaeda and Wahabi doctrine and ideology. So this is the only danger that we are going to face regarding our society, harmony, and coexistence that you just mentioned.

Question 7: Mr. President, I would like to go again to the international arena. What is in your opinion the role of the U.S.-led international coalition in relation to the groups that operate in northern Syria, in particular regarding the Kurds group. I mean the bombing of the American airplanes and the coalition in the northern part of the country. What to do you think about that?

President Assad: You know, traditionally, the American administrations, when they had relations with any group or community in any country, it is not for the sake of the country, it is not for the interest of the people; it is for the agenda of the United States. So, that is what we have to ask ourselves: why would the Americans support any group in Syria? Not for Syria. They must have their agenda, and the American agenda has always been divisive in any country. They don't work to unite the people; they work to make division between the different kinds of people. Sometimes they choose a sectarian group, sometimes they choose an ethnic group in order to support them against other ethnicities or to push them in a way that takes them far from the rest of the society. This is their agenda. So, it is very clear that this American support is not related to ISIS, it is not related to al-Nusra, it is not related to fighting terrorism, because since the beginning of the American intervention, ISIS was expanding, not shrinking. It has only started to shrink when the Russian support to the Syrian Army took place last September.

Question 8: Mr. President, what is your opinion about the recent coup d'état in Turkey, and its impact on the current situation in that country, and on the international level, and on the

Syrian conflict also?

Coup in Turkey is a reflection of instability and disturbances within the country

President Assad: Such a coup d'état, we have to look at it as a reflection of instability and disturbances within Turkey, mainly on the social level. It could be political, it could be whatever, but at the end, the society is the main issue when you have instability. Regardless of who is going to govern Turkey, who is going to be the president, who is going to be the leader of Turkey; this is an internal issue. We don't interfere, we don't make the mistake to say that Erdogan should go or should stay. This is a Turkish issue, and the Turkish people have to decide.

Erdogan used the coup to implement his Muslim Brotherhood agenda

But what is more important than the coup d'état itself, we have to look at the procedures and the steps that are being taken by Erdogan and his coterie recently during the last few days, when they started attacking the judges; they removed more than 2,700 judges from their positions, more than 1,500 professors in the universities, more than 15,000 employees in the education sector. What do the universities and the judges and that civil society have to do with the coup d'état? So, that reflects the bad intentions of Erdogan and his misconduct and his real intentions toward what happened, because the investigation hasn't been finalized yet. How did they take the decision to remove all those? So, he used the coup d'état in order to implement his own extremist agenda, Muslim Brotherhood agenda, within Turkey, and that is dangerous for Turkey and for the neighboring countries, including Syria.

Question 9: Mr. President, how do you evaluate the Syrian government's relations with the opposition inside Syria? What is the difference between these opposition organizations and those based outside Syria?

"Oppositions" outside Syria are traitors…the real opposition is the one based inside and works for the Syrian people

President Assad: We have good relations with the opposition within Syria based on the national principles. Of course, they have their own political agenda and they have their own beliefs, and we have our own agenda and our beliefs, and the way we can make the dialogue either directly or through the ballot boxes; it could be a different way of dialogue, which is the situation in every country. But we cannot compare them with the other oppositions outside Syria, because the word "opposition" means to resort to peaceful means, not to support terrorists, and not to be formed outside your country, and to have grassroots, to have real grassroots made of Syrian people. You cannot have your grassroots be the foreign ministry in the UK, France or the intelligence in Qatar and Saudi Arabia and the United States. This is not opposition, this is called, in that case, you are called a traitor. So, they call them oppositions, we call them traitors. The real opposition is the one that works for the Syrian people and is based in Syria and its agenda derived its vision from the Syrian people and the Syrian interests.

Question 10: Mr. President, how do you evaluate the insistence of the U.S. and its allies that you leave power in addition to the campaign to distort the image of your government? I mean, in the foreign environment. How do you see that insistence from them that you leave power?

President Assad: Regarding their wish for me to leave power, they have been talking about this for the last five years, and we never responded even with a statement. We never cared about them. Actually, this is a Syrian issue; only the Syrian people can say who should come and go, who should stay in his position, who should leave, and the West knows our position very well regarding this. So, we don't care and don't have to waste our time with their rhetoric. I am here because of the support of the Syrian people. Without that, I wouldn't be here. That is very simple.

It is part of the American politics to demonize presidents

About how they defame, or try to demonize certain presidents, this is the American way, at least since the second World War, since they substituted British colonization in this region, and maybe in the world, the American administrations and the American politicians haven't said a single honest word regarding anything. They always lie. And as time goes by, they are becoming more inveterate liars, so this is part of their politics. So, to demonize me is like how they tried to demonize President Putin during the last two years and they did the same with the leader Castro during the last five and six decades. This is their way. So, we have to know that this is the American way. We don't have to worry about it. The most important thing is to have good reputation among your own people. That is what we have to worry about.

Question 11: Mr. President, what is your opinion on Syria's relation with Latin America, particularly the historical links with Cuba



President Assad: In spite of the long distance between Syria and Latin America, we are always surprised how much the people in Latin America, not only the politicians, know about this region. I think this has many reasons, but one of them is the historical similarities and commonalities between our region, between Syria and Latin America. Latin America was under direct occupation for long time ago but after that it was under the occupation of the American companies, and the American coup d'états and the American intervention.

Intervention: Yes, a lot of them.

Latin America People understand that the war in Syria is about independence…there is strong harmony between Syria and Latin America, especially Cuba

President Assad: So, they know what is the meaning of being independent or not to be independent. They understand that the war in Syria is about independence. But the most important thing is the role of Cuba. Cuba was the spearhead of the independence movement within Latin America and Fidel Castro was the iconic figure in that regard. So, on

the political level and the knowledge level, there is a strong harmony between Syria and Latin America, especially Cuba. But I do not think we work enough to improve the other part of the relation; to be on the same level mainly on the educational and the economic level. That was my ambition before the crisis and that is why I visited Latin America, Cuba, Venezuela, Argentine and Brazil, in order to invigorate this relation. Then, we had this conflict started and it was a big obstacle to do anything in that regard, but I think that we have not to restrain the relation on the historical and the political levels. That is not enough. You have so many other sectors, people should know more about each other. The long distance could be an obstacle, but it shouldn't because we have strong relations with the rest of the world, east and west. So, it is not an obstacle in these days. So, I think if we overcome this crisis and this war, we should work harder in order to invigorate the different sectors of this relation with Latin America and especially with Cuba.

Question 12: Mr. President, do you have an expectation for… I mean would you tell me your opinion about the electoral process in the United States mainly for the president? Now, we have two candidates; the Republican one is Mr. Donald Trump and the Democratic one is Mrs. Hillary Clinton; and we know her very well, but what is your opinion about this process, about the result of this process and how it could impact the conflict here, in the war in Syria?

No US president in the near future will come to make dramatic change in the politics of the United States

President Assad: We resumed our relation with the United States in 1974. Now, it has been 42 years since then and we witnessed many American presidents in different situations and the lesson that we have learned is that no one should bet on any American president, that is the most important thing. So, it is not about the name. They have institutions, they have their own agenda and every president should come to implement that agenda in his own way, but at the end he has to implement that agenda.
All of them have militaristic agendas, and the only difference is the way. One of them sends his army like Bush and the other one sends mercenaries and proxies like Obama, but all of them have to implement this agenda. So, I do not believe that the president is allowed completely to fulfill his own political convictions in the United States, he has to obey the institutions and the lobbies, and the lobbies have not changed and the institutions' agenda has not changed. So, no president in the near future will come to make a serious and dramatic change regarding the politics of the United States.

Question 13: Mr. President, one final question: what message would you send using this interview with Prensa Latina to the governments and people of Latin America, the Caribbean, and also why not the American people, about the importance of supporting Syria against terrorism?

Message to Latin America: We have to keep our independence as the US will not stop trying to topple every independent government

President Assad: Latin America is a very good and important example to the world about how the people and their governments regain their independence. They are the backyard of the United States as the United States sees, but this backyard was used by the United States to play its own games, to implement its own agenda and the people in Latin America sacrificed a lot in order to regain their independence and everybody knows that.

After regaining their independence, those countries moved from being developing countries, or sometimes under-developed countries, to be developed countries. So, independence is a very important thing and it is very dear for every Latin American citizen. We think they have to keep this independence because the United States will not stop trying to topple every independent government, every government that reflects the vast majority of the people in every country in Latin America.
And again, Cuba knows this, knows what I am talking about more than any other one in the world; you suffered more than anyone from the American attempts and you succeeded in withstanding all these attempts during the last sixty years or more just because the government reflected the Cuban people.

So, holding strongly to this independence, I think, is the crucial thing, the most important thing for the future of Latin America. Regarding Syria, we can say that Syria is paying the price of its independence because we never worked against the United States; we never worked against France or the UK. We always try to have good relations with the West.
But their problem is that they do not accept any independent country and I think this is same for Cuba. You never tried to do any harm to the American people but they do not accept you as an independent country. The same is true for other countries in Latin America and that's why you always have coup d'états mainly between the sixties and the seventies.

So, I think preserving the independence of a certain country is not only an isolated case; if I want to be independent, I have to support the independence in the rest of the world. So, the independence anywhere in the world, including Latin America, will support my independence. If I am alone, I will be weak. Supporting Syria will be mainly in the international arena. There are many international organizations, mainly the United Nation, in spite of its impotence, but at the end, their support could play a vital role in supporting Syria and, of course, the Security Council; it depends on who is going to be the temporary member in the Security Council, and any other organization supporting Syria will be very important.

Question 14: Mr. President, I know that you are a very busy person, that is why I appreciate very much your time that you have dedicated to Prensa Latina interview in this moment. I hope this would not be the last interview that we have with you.

President Assad: You are welcome anytime.

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