



US Condemns Assad's Vow to Liberate Syria from Terrorists

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The United States has condemned Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's pledge to regain control of the entire country, saying there is no military solution to the years-long conflict.

State Department Spokesman Mark Toner said on Friday that the Syrian president does not have "any legitimacy, but others do."

« He [Assad] is not a legitimate leader for his people... He is deluded if he thinks there's a military solution to the conflict in Syria, » he stated.



Toner was responding to an interview Assad gave to AFP published earlier on Friday in which the Syrian president said he intended to liberate the whole country from control of the terrorists.

"Regardless of whether we can do that or not, this is a goal we are seeking to achieve without any hesitation," President Assad said. "It makes no sense for us to say that we will give up any part."



President Assad gestures during an exclusive interview with AFP in the capital Damascus on February 11, 2016.

(AFP photo)

Toner's rebuke came a day after US Secretary of State John Kerry and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, led a meeting of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) in the German city of Munich, where the working group of 17 countries began a new round of Syria peace talks.

The talks are aimed at galvanizing efforts to implement a nationwide ceasefire and "accelerate and expand the delivery of humanitarian aid" in Syria, Kerry said.



Lavrov (L) speaks next to Kerry during a news conference after the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) meeting in Munich on February 12, 2016. (AFP photo)

In his interview, Assad warned that the involvement of regional countries in the conflict meant that the process to liberate Syria would take a long time.

He said it would be possible to end the war “in less than a year” if militant supply routes from neighboring countries were cut.

The Syrian leader also warned of the possibility of direct intervention by Saudi Arabia and Turkey, two regional players that have longed backed the militants fighting the Assad government.

The Saudi foreign minister, Adel al-Jubeir, said on Friday that Assad’s removal was vital to defeat the Daesh terrorist group. “We will achieve it,” he told the Munich conference.

Saudi Arabia has expressed readiness to deploy special forces in Syria if the US-led coalition decides to deploy ground troops.

Since September 2014, the US and some of its allies have been conducting airstrikes purportedly against Daesh inside Syria without any approval from the Syrian government or a UN mandate.

The foreign-sponsored conflict in Syria, which flared up in March 2011, has reportedly killed some 470,000 people, according to the Syrian Center for Policy Research.

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