

## **President al-Assad in an interview with Russian RT-UK TV Channel:**

**In spite of all aggression, majority of Syrian people support their Government, Russia helps Syria as terrorism and its ideology have no borders**



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Damascus, SANA- President Bashar al-Assad affirmed that the majority of the Syrian people support their Government and that's why we've been here for nine years in spite of all this aggression by the West and the Petrodollar in the Arab region, indicating that the Syrian people know the whole story, and they know where their interest lies.

In an interview with Russian RT-UK TV Channel, President al-Assad asserted that Russia is helping Syria in combating terrorism because it defends its people as terrorism and its ideology have no borders, and they don't see political borders, and the whole world today has become a one arena for terrorism, and Russia adopts and implements the international law in correlation with its national interest, and the interests of its people and with the global stability and with the Syrian interest and the Syrian stability.

President al-Assad indicated that the accusations of chemical weapons attacks have been just allegations and those who spoke about their occurrence must prove his story and provide the evidence, particularly as the "White Helmets" Organization which has fabricated dramas are off-shoot of "Jabhat al-Nusra" "terrorist organization.

President al-Assad indicated that Daesh "ISIS" terrorist organization have two partners in stealing the Syrian oil since the year 2014: Erdogan and his coterie, and the Americans who always try to loot the other countries.

President al-Assad affirmed that the Israelis are the enemies of Syria and that they occupy its land, and they have direct relation with the terrorists, and every time the Syrian army advanced against those Al-Nusra terrorists in the south, Israel used to bombard the Syrian troops. So, the link is very clear, and there was correlation between the Israeli operations and the terrorist's operations

Following is the full text of the interview:

**Question 1:** I'm Afshin Rattansi in the Presidential Palace in Damascus, Welcome to an RT International World exclusive. I'm with the President of Syria, Bashar Al-Assad. Mr. President, thanks for granting us an interview. I would like to start off with why you are going to give an interview now when you haven't done for a year and a half?

**President Assad:** You are most welcome in Syria. The events in the world in general, in the region and in Syria, after the Turkish invasion have brought Syria front and center once again, this is one reason. The second – I think public opinion in the world, and especially in the West has been shifting during the past few years. They know that their officials have told them so many lies about what's going on in the region, in the Middle East, in Syria, in Yemen. They know there is a lie, but they don't know the truth; so, I think, it's time to talk about this truth. Third, I made so many interviews with Western media outlets; they don't try to get the information, they try to get a scoop. They don't try to be objective to bring their audience what's happening in the world. That's why, I stopped doing interviews for years.

**Question 2:** Well okay, we've been in a journey from Damascus airport, we saw reconstruction; how many soldiers have been killed; wounded or displaced from your country in the past, since 2011?

**President Assad:** The stability that you saw during the last 24 hours in Damascus since you arrived is the result of the sacrifice of more than one hundred thousand Syrian soldiers who were martyred or wounded. So many lives, of course, let alone the thousands or maybe tens of thousands of civilians or innocents who've been killed by mortars, by executions, by being kidnapped and killed later or disappeared; their families are still waiting till now. So, there was a lot of sacrifice in the face of those terrorists. That's why you see this stability and reconstruction.

**Question 3:** Countries that supported you include Iran, of course, Russia. Before I get on to British and American de facto backing for ISIS and Al-Qaeda in your country, how would you...what would you say to Russian families that had lost their Russian soldiers who had risked and sacrificed their lives for a "dictator", for a "Middle East Dictator"? What would you say to them, as to why Vladimir Putin should be sending in soldiers to help your government?

**President Assad:** You mentioned a very important point. Even in Syria, no one would die for a person. People would die, especially en masse for a cause, and this cause is defending their country, defending their existence, their future, rather than somebody coming from another country to die for a person, whether he is a dictator or whatever you want to call him. So, this is not realistic, this is against the logic that somebody will come, because President Putin sent him to die for another person, or

even for President Putin to put all the interests of his country at stake for one person. This is against the logic.

Actually, Russia, according to officials I mean President Putin, Lavrov and the others, they are defending the Russian interests in different ways. One aspect if they fight terrorism in another country, whether it is Syria or any other country in the region, that would defend the Russian people because terrorism and its ideology have no borders, they don't see political borders. It's one, let's say, one arena, the whole world is one arena for terrorism. Secondly, they implement and they adopt the international law. According to their point of view, this international law, if it's implemented, it's in correlation with their interest, with their national interests. So, implementing the international law around the world will help the interest of the Russian people. So, what they've been doing is in accordance with their national interests, with the global stability and with the Syrian interest and the Syrian stability.

**Question 4:** Now, you know that in media in NATO countries, this country, your government, you personally, are synonymous with chemical weapons attacks. Let us go back to the twenty first of August, 2013, in Ghouta. Did your government drop chemical weapons on Ghouta on that date, the twenty first of August, 2013?

The funny thing about that date is that it is the same date when the first delegation, the international delegation that came to Syria to investigate the incident arrived to Damascus, which is only few kilometers from this place; and logically, the Syrian army, if we supposed that it has chemical weapons, it wants to use it, it would not use it on that day, this is first. Second, they talked about two hundred civilians killed. If you use chemical weapons, you may kill tens of thousands in such area where people are living very close to each other, I mean it's a crowded area. Third, that incident only existed in the mind of the Western officials; it's a narrative that was the pretext to attack Syria. That's what I mean. They did not offer any tangible evidence to prove that there was such an attack, and there were many reports that have refuted that report or those allegations. So, it was only allegation; never, never has the Syrian army used chemical weapons before we handed over all arsenals to the international committee.

**Question 5:** Of course, then you took the decision to invite the OPCW into remove chemical weapons.

**President Assad:** Actually, we invited them to come because we told them, you should come and investigate because we were hundred percent sure that these are allegations; but, of course, the delegation, not always, unbiased, they are mostly biased.

**Journalist:** Well, I mean the President of OPCW Fernando Arias, he may have his own problems with whistleblowers now. There is no doubt that Ahmet Üzümcü Director General of the OPCW who monitored the destruction here...he said there were gaps, uncertainties, discrepancies in your OPCW monitored destruction of chemical weapons here in this country?

**President Assad:** Gaps in our report?

**Journalist:** Yes.

**President Assad:** Why they don't show it?! Now, it's been since 2013, we've been here, in the same allegation, couldn't they prove it after six years? And every time they say, Syria has used chemical weapons. Is it possible to be under this precise, let's say, supervision by the whole Western world and we're going to use it again and again?! This is not rational; I mean the whole story, we don't need it, we are advancing. Every time they talk about using the chemical weapons, it is when we advance, not when we lose. I mean, even militarily, you may use, if you want to use such a weapon, I'm not talking about the Syrian Army, because we don't have it anymore, but logically, you can use it when you're losing ground, not when you're advancing.

**Journalist:** So, you deny the use in Jubar, Sheikh Maksoud, Saraqib, and in the area of Aleppo, you presumably deny Khan Sheikhoun, 4th April, 2017. All of these, you deny the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government?

**President Assad:** Every story was nothing more than allegation. The one who said there was use of chemical weapons, is the one who should prove his story, he is the one who should offer evidence that it's been used.

**Journalist:** But the OPCW did lead Britain and the United States and France to believe they needed it to bomb your country on the basis of that report.

**President Assad:** To believe... but believe is one thing, and bringing evidence is another. So, we are talking about evidence. What's the evidence that they have to prove their story? Nothing, they have nothing.

**Question 6:** Any truth in the rumors, arguably on your side that video evidence was manipulated by rebels using chemical weapons via the Saudi Arabian government, and that chemical weapons were indeed used, but by the so-called "rebels"...

**President Assad:** Yes, it is on the YOUTUBE, you can see it. I mean they staged a play, full play, where somebody plays the role of the victim in many incidents, not only with the chemical weapons, even with bombardments, they stage a play that somebody is being the victim, and then at the end of the shooting, he is a normal person, he stands up and moves normally; you can see it on YouTube. It is very clear; we can offer you this evidence.

**Journalist:** But there is no other evidence beyond that, because the White Helmets supported by the British Foreign Office and recently given extra funding by the Trump administration claim the videos are absolutely true, and that, in fact, the people who're making these videos saved a hundred and fifty thousand lives in your country up to 2018?

**President Assad:** Again. it's very simple to see the same faces of those "angels," – the White Helmets, – the same faces, the same one in the White Helmets was a fighter with Al-Qaeda. You can see him. The images are very clear. The same one who has been beheading, or cutting heads, and one of them was eating the heart of a soldier. I mean, this is very common to see on the internet. I mean no one in this

region believe the stunt, the PR stunt of the White Helmets. They are off-shoot of Al-Nusra.

**Question 7:** Well, the UK state-mandated BBC and Amnesty International are alleging your government killed eleven thousand people using so-called “barrel bombs” since 2012 which would be a violation of Security Council Resolution 2139, and indeed Human Rights Watch’s pointing to satellite imagery, and you talk of YOUTUBE videos saying they are fake videos. These are some of NATO nations biggest NGOs and broadcasters.

**President Assad:** No war is a good war. This is a self-evident truth. You always have victims in any war, but to talk about an army or state to go and kill civilians and its own people, this is not realistic for simple reason. The war in Syria was about capturing the hearts of the people, and you cannot capture the hearts of the people by bombarding them. The Syrian army was fighting the terrorists, whether there is side fire that affected some civilians, that could have happened and you can have investigation, but how could Syrian people support their state and their president and their army, if they are killing them?

**Question 8:** Was the only way to regain East Aleppo...did your commanders or you personally authorize the only way to get rid of Al-Qaeda, ISIS-Daesh, arguably backed by Britain and the United States, the only way to get rid of them was Aerial bombardment?

**President Assad:** Definitely, and we succeeded. In some areas, we captured the area without war. We made negotiations with those groups and they left that area, and then we entered.

**Journalist:** But you see in the pictures, and you presumably say those pictures are true, of the destruction in East Aleppo. Was that really the only way to defeat Al-Qaeda and ISIS-linked groups.

**President Assad:** Those Al-Qaeda groups in eastern Aleppo used to bombard the civilians on daily basis and killed hundreds of thousands of people in Aleppo. So, the mission of the Army and the mission of the state is to protect those civilians from those terrorists. How can we do that without attacking the terrorists?!

**Question 9:** Well, that’s not shown in media in NATO nations, in your defense. Now, what about the use of double tap strikes by the Syrian and the Russian air force where you bomb a part of east Aleppo and then emergency workers come and you bomb again?

**President Assad:** There are a lot of misleading narratives in the West just to show that the Syrian Army is intentionally killing the civilians with no reason, and to show that those, that they called them, like White Helmets or any other hospital which is a headquarter for the terrorists, they say that the Syrian army is only attacking the humanitarian facilities in order for the civilians to suffer. Actually, what happened is the opposite; that those civilians fled those areas and came to the government side in every place not only in Eastern Aleppo. Those people now, if you go to Eastern Aleppo, they still live in those areas under the supervision of the government, why

didn't we kill them? Why didn't they flee to Turkey? This itself refutes the Western narrative.

**Journalist:** But as I said, Raed Saleh the head of the British backed White Helmets spoke on my program and said they are just a humanitarian organization; they are not terrorists at all, despite what you and the Russian government allege.

**President Assad:** But you have pictures, you have videos, you have proofs. So, we don't have any allegations. How did we know? Through their images. We can offer you all these evidences. We have evidences.

**Question 10:** I mean going back a little to the first demonstrations in Daraa, in Damascus, there is a famous, again BBC state-mandated British media program in which Walid Jumblatt of the Druze in Beirut who said to camera that you authorized the killing of thirteen-year old Hamza al-Khateeb, is that true? And they then interviewed a succession of people saying the mistakes you made led to what happened. It wasn't the British and American backing of Al-Qaeda and ISIS-Daesh in your country?

**President Assad:** At the very beginning during the demonstrations, during the first few days, we lost five policemen by shooting, by bullets. How could we talk about peaceful demonstrations while you have policemen killed by...

**Journalist:** But how could you authorize the killing of a thirteen-year old?

**President Assad:** ...I'm just starting from the very beginning. So, from the very beginning, I mean the word "peaceful demonstrations" was not correct. There was shooting, and you can't tell who's shooting at police, and who's the one shooting at the civilians, because in most of the incidents at that time, the police didn't have even machine guns or pistols.

**Journalist:** Except this child was tortured?

**President Assad:** No, No, that's not true. He's not, we never had...

**Journalist:** cigarette burns on his body...

**President Assad:** No, no. He was killed, and there was allegation that he was tortured. He wasn't tortured, he was killed, and he was taken to the hospital, and I met his parents. They know the real story. This is only in the West, in the Western outlets, in the Western media outlets. This is not the story in Syria. So, that's why I'm surprised by those stories that are completely disconnected from our reality. He is somebody who died, how did he die, who shot him, Nobody knows. It was chaos. When you have chaotic demonstrations, anyone could infiltrate that demonstration and start shooting in different directions and kill policemen in order to retaliate or vice versa.

**Question 11:** Have you heard of Anwar Raslan and Eyad al-Gharib who have been arrested in Germany. The Germans are alleging something called Branch 251, one of your torture units, to torture demonstrators?

**President Assad:** We don't have torture units. We don't have torture policy in Syria. Why do we use the torture for? That's the question, why? Is it a psychological situation?! You just want to torture people in this kind of sadism? Why to torture? You need information?! We have all the information. The majority of the Syrian people supported their government, that's why we've been here for nine years in spite of all this aggression by the West and the Petrodollar in the Arab region. That's why, this is the only reason. So, why do you torture the people, that's the question. It's not a policy. If you talk about individual incidents, this is only an individual incident that could be done by anyone for revenge, for any other reason. That could happen in anywhere in the world. But we don't have such policy. We never believe in that torture could make your situation better as a state, very simply. So, we don't use it.

**Question 12:** What did you make of it when the British government sent the Royal navy to intercept an Iranian vessel; they said the Iranian government really was sending heating oil for Syria, are the sanctions from the European Union going to hit the poorest people in Syria this winter?

**President Assad:** Exactly. First of all, this is piracy. This is piracy by the United Kingdom regime, and this is the core meaning of the word "regime", because regime and piracy and gangs is something similar. Second, yes they wanted to effect the people in Syria, why? Because those people were expected to rise against their government during the different stages of the war, but they didn't. They were supposed to be supporting the terrorists, the "moderate rebels", "the angels of White Helmets", but the people didn't, they stood with their government. So, they have to suffer, they have to pay the price. First of all, they have to learn the lesson that they should have stood with their agenda. Second, this is maybe the last ditch-attempt in order to push them to be against their government. But they tried it last winter, they tried it before, and it did not work because the people knew the whole story, and they knew where their interest lies.

**Question 13:** Even when the Global South and you and your government ministers may think it's natural to accuse NATO governments of supporting AL Qaeda or ISIS, viewers watching this interview in those NATO countries may think this is ridiculous. Why would the British government say, or the Obama government, because I suppose Donald Trump, arguably, has suddenly realized what maybe going on, why do you think they wanted to support AL Qaeda and ISIS-Daesh.

**President Assad:** Why? Because of the facts. These facts started with the fact that the American officials before anyone else said in their own words like John Kerry, like Hilary Clinton and many others when they talked about their role in supporting Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in order to be a tool against the Soviet Union at that time, they said that. This is their modus operandi; it's not something we invented.

**Journalist:** They saw 9/11, why would they make the same mistake again?

**President Assad:** Because the American policy in general depends on trials and errors. They invaded Afghanistan, they got nothing. They invaded Iraq, they got nothing, and they started to invade other countries but in different ways. They change the way. The problem with the Unites States now is that they fight a survival

war from their point of view because they are losing their hegemony. So, they wanted to fight the Russian, the Iranians, the Syrians, whoever said NO, even their allies if they said NO, like the Western governments, they will fight with them. They need tools; they noticed that in Iraq it did not work by sending their army. They lost a lot, and they paid the price even inside the United States. So, it's much easier for them to send a proxy. So, Al-Qaeda is a proxy against the Syrian government, against the Russian government and the Iranian government. That's why they've been using this, but you have evidence. How did ISIS rise suddenly in 2014?! Out of nowhere! out of nothing! In Iraq and Syria at the same time, with American armaments?! It's very clear. How could they smuggle millions of barrels of oil to Turkey under the supervision of the American aircrafts, how? Because the Americans wanted to use them against the Syrian Army. It's not something we said; the Americans said that, and the facts said the same story.

**Question 14:** But while this has been going on, you have been talking with international bodies and different interlocutors, what do you make of the UN envoy, Staffan de Mistura, saying in quotations in the past few days "having really fought against what happened in Aleppo, Idlib, and Darayya, I could not be the one that is shaking Assad's hand and saying MAALESH", these are the people you are talking to as neutral observers. Looking back on it, were any of these people neutral?

**President Assad:** He cannot be in that position if he is neutral because the United States will only accept puppets. This is their behavior.

**Journalist:** But you did shake hands with him?

**President Assad:** And he asked later to meet me, and I said no. So, he wanted to shake my hand. He was biased, that's why he failed. This is why he failed; he was implementing the American Agenda maybe in a little bit smarter way, but it didn't work because he was biased, that's why.

**Question 15:** And what is this Geneva process; there have been some reports that the Syrian delegation is backed by your government but not representing the Syrian government, what is exactly is this Geneva process? Post-conflict? I'm not even sure it's called that.

**President Assad:** It's an American ploy; it's about gaining in politics what you couldn't get through the demonstrations first, and through the terrorists later, so you can get it through political process. That's why, again, it didn't work. That's why Geneva failed because it was about toppling the government through an interim body, let's say, it doesn't matter what is it. Then change the government peacefully and control Syria like they did in many other countries. That's why Geneva failed, and that's why we went to Sochi with the Russians. That's why Sochi is now working. We had this delegation last month and they started last week negotiating the constitution.

**Journalist:** So, when Donald Trump announces...

**President Assad:** Sorry, you are asking me about this Geneva or about...

**Journalist:** I was talking about this Geneva.

**President Assad:** Now, if you talk about this Geneva, this Geneva is only the venue, the place, the geography, but I mean the political process is still Sochi. It is Sochi. It does not matter where we convene, or where we start the negotiation; it's Sochi.

**Question 16:** But it goes into mainstream Western media in NATO nations that it is Geneva, not Sochi. And do you believe this curious story that the Russians are saying that the US is stealing 30 million Dollars of oil a month from Northern Syria? Is this a Trump bargaining chip in the Geneva talks, why would a net oil exporter like the US be interested in 30 million Dollars of oil a month?

Since ISIS started smuggling Syrian oil and looting Syrian Oil in 2014, they had two partners: Erdogan and his coterie, and the Americans, whether the CIA or others. So, what Trump did is just announce the truth; he is not talking about something new. Even when some of the Kurds started looting the Syrian oil, the Americans were their partners. So, it's about money, and it's about the oil, and that's what Trump said recently. It is not new at all; it is not related to the talks at all.

**Journalist:** But arguably, why are you not more angry because obviously that would be a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention on Pillaging of countries' resources.

**President Assad:** Of course, we are angry, every Syrian is angry – definitely. This is looting, but there is no international order actually, and there is no international law. But this is not new, to be frank, not only during the war. The Americans always try to loot other countries in different ways regarding not only their oil or money, or financial resources. They loot their rights, their political rights, every other right. That's their historical role at least after World War II. So, it's not something new, it's not strange or disconnected from their previous policy, but from time to time it takes different shape, and this shape, looting the oil, is the starkest way of the American policy, looting the rights of other people.

**Question 17:** Was a big part of the war, fossil fuel pipeline access to Europe from the Middle East, that would cut Russian pipeline access to the European Union?

**President Assad:** This is very realistic, but some say that they ask the President to open Syria for a pipeline, south north, and he said no for Russians – actually, that did not happen. This is not true, but there was a pipeline that's coming east west from Iran, through Iraq, Syria to the Mediterranean. If this one was a reason, it could be. If the war is about the oil as a factor, yes this is likely to be. But this is not the only factor; don't forget that there is a war between the United States and the rest of the world. Now, we're talking about tectonic shifting and earthquakes. Because the world order after World War II has expired, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union; the one polar world doesn't work anymore. So, you have rising powers like Russia, China and India and other countries. The United States does not accept any partner in leading the world, even UK, France, even other big countries, I wouldn't call them great powers because this is another meaning, they are not great anymore. They don't accept partners. That's why they are fighting now. So, the war in Syria is microcosm of the world war III, let's say, but without armaments; through

proxies. You have different factors. The oil is one factor of the war, not because of the oil. I don't think, I don't believe just because of the oil.

**Question 18:** Of course, some might say that Syria historically, your father and yourself have always supported the Palestinians and the UN resolutions governing the Palestinians. Do you see Israel, which after all many believe to be a nuclear weapons of mass destruction power as influencing policy in the European Commission, in the State Department and in the Pentagon?

**President Assad:** Definitely. Israelis are our enemy, they occupy our land, and it's self-evident, intuitive to be part of anything that could happen against Syria, any plan, any instigation, directly through their relation with the terrorists, and Netanyahu was visiting the terrorists who've been treated in their hospitals.

**Journalist:** Do you believe those pictures are true that the Israeli government was directly supporting Al Qaeda-linked and ISIS-Daesh-linked militants trying to destroy your government?

**President Assad:** The Israelis published these photos formally as news; it wasn't our allegations. Second, every time the Syrian army advanced against those Al-Nusra terrorists in the south, Israel used to bombard our troops, and whenever we advance somewhere else in Syria, their airplanes started committing air strikes against our army. That's what's happening. So, the link is very clear. There was correlation between the Israeli operations and the terrorist's operations. So, first through the terrorists directly, second through the Americans, and third through the Europeans. They have one agenda and one interest, and before the war not only during the war. So, it's very normal and expected and likely that the Israeli should be part of all of this.

**Question 19:** Of course, while Britain, the United States, European powers have aerielly bombarded your country to destroy your government, the big news in NATO-nation media was the Al-Baghdadi assassination by the 75th Ranger Regiment in Idlib province. Is it your understanding going on from what you just said that Al-Baghdadi is essentially trained by the United States under torture in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq?

**President Assad:** He was in their prisons under their supervision, and the Americans were the ones who released Al-Baghdadi, so they wouldn't release him without any role, and suddenly Al-Baghdadi became Al-Khalifah of the Muslims in the world as he assigned himself. He was prepared by the Americans to play that role and we don't believe this recent story of killing him. Maybe he is killed, but it's not about what they've mentioned. The whole story was about whitewashing the American hand from being hand in a glove with the terrorists during the last, not only few years, but during the last decades. This is like in the fiction movies when they erase your memory. They wanted to erase the memory of their public opinion that they were in direct link with those terrorists, especially Al- Qaeda, ISIS and Al-Nusra. When Saddam Hussein was captured, they showed him. When he was executed, they showed the event of execution. When his children were killed, they showed their bodies. The same with al-Gaddafi. Why didn't they show us the body of Bin Laden? Why didn't they show us the body of Al-Baghdadi? Just fake story

about being against terrorists and this very sophisticated operation. Maybe he is killed because he is expired as a person; they needed somebody else, and maybe they wanted to change the whole name of ISIS into another name to bring ISIS as a moderate organization to be used again in the market against the Syrian government.

**Journalist:** Again, the media has not broadcast that, but of course the Trump administration thanked your government when it came to the assassination of Al-Baghdadi.

**President Assad:** We are not part of any operation.

**Journalist:** You are not in dialogue with them.

**President Assad:** At all, there is no relation between any institution in Syria and any institution in the United States.

**Journalist:** Nor with EU representatives at the recent Geneva talks?

**President Assad:** No, no one at all. We don't have any relation with most of the Western countries who play direct role against Syria.

**Journalist:** I know you are antagonistic with NATO-nation Turkey, but Mr. Erdogan and arguably yourself must be aware that Western policy is liable for blowback into the European Union. What have you made of say European Union governments response to the possible outflow of British ISIS-Daesh fighters back into the European Union, how dangerous is it to be in London or Paris or Berlin?

**President Assad:** Actually, the relation between Erdogan and the EU is two ways: they hate him but they want him. They hate him, they know that he is fanatic Islamist, they know this, and they know that he's going to send them those extremists or maybe terrorists.

**Journalist:** He took in many refugees from your country.

**President Assad:** Many of them are from Syria and some from them no they come from different areas in the world not only Syria actually, but the majority are Syrians; not all of them are extremists, not the majority of them are terrorists. Actually, most of the Syrians who left to Turkey, they left because of the terrorism in Syria, because of the bombardment of the terrorists and so on. So, they don't want him (Erdogan), but at the same time, they fear him. But from the other side, let's say that sending those Syrians and other refugees is dangerous, the most dangerous on Europe is to support the terrorists in Syria, this is the most dangerous part. So, this is hypocrisy; how can you fear those few millions, the majority of them are moderates and they have few terrorists, while you support those terrorists directly in tens of thousands at least and maybe hundreds of thousands in Syria and you don't fear that they're going to go back to your country.

**Question 20:** Well, the British government takes away the citizenship of British ISIS ex-fighters arguably. Okay, but then presently the fighting in Idlib, Russian warplanes

in action there, how far away are you from reintegrating Idlib? Will be there an amnesty for these people that have tried to overthrow your Syrian government?

**President Assad:** Militarily, it will not take long time if we start to liberate Idlib, but actually what we do, our plan, is to give a chance for the civilians to leave, and that's what happening. But they've been, actually, not leaving freely towards the government; they've been smuggled, they've been, how to say, coming like leakage, few families every week, let's say, because they could be killed if they want to leave.

**Journalist:** Southwards or Westwards towards ...

**President Assad:** Southward towards the government, it's actually southwards or eastwards. This is very important for us to give chance for those civilians to leave in order not to be harmed.

**Journalist:** But there are airstrikes backed by Russia and your military forces. There are reports in the past few days that civilians have died, how soon is Idlib is going to be reintegrated?

**President Assad:** Those airstrikes are against the terrorist's facilities, very simply.

**Journalist:** The humanitarian Organizations?

**President Assad:** In the Western narrative, in the Western media, the narrative during the nine years of the war that every Syrian or, let's say, Russian airstrike should be against the civilians and the humanitarian facilities. Unfortunately, according to them, our bullets and missiles and bombs, they can only kill civilians; they don't kill militants! Always as you see. So, NO, this is again part of the Western narrative and I think just discussing this narrative is just a waste of time. Again, this is against our interest. Our interest lies in killing the terrorists in order to protect the civilians, not leaving those civilians, innocents, under the supervision of the terrorists and being killed by them.

**Question 21:** Okay, but what is the nature of your agreement with the Syrian Defense Forces? So many different names of organizations in your country, many of them, the white hat good guys in NATO nation media, is there power sharing going on, who are the Syrian Defense Forces?

**President Assad:** With the SDF? No, it's about regaining control, full control of the territory wherever the Syrian Army moves and brings with it the services of the government. So, it has full sovereignty over these territories. But this agreement is about the SDF withdrawing 30 kilometers southward in order to remove the pretext of the Turks to invade Syria.

Let's say, we are in a transitional period because they are going to keep their armaments now, but we invited them to join the Syrian Army. Some of them said NO, the last few days some of them said YES that they are ready to join the Army, so we do not know what is going on to happen yet, but we invited them to join the Army in order to have a normal situation as it used to be before the war, when the law prevailed and the state prevailed, nobody else.

**Question 22:** As for Kurdish forces, are they just tired after so many years, I mean, your understanding is they took money from the US and the CIA; now you're welcoming them back.

**President Assad:** First of all, the SDF is not only Kurds; it is a mix of Kurds and Arab and others. Second, when we talk about the SDF, the Kurds in the SDF, they represent part of the Kurds. The majority of the Kurds had a good relationship with the government, and the majority of the Kurds supports the government, but this part which is called the PYD is the one who's been supported by the Americans publicly, their armament, their money, they smuggled oil together, they are American agents, to be frank, most of them, I wouldn't say all of them, I do not know all of them. But their policy during the last few years is to invite the Americans to stay, to be angry when America wants to leave and to say: we do not want to join the Syrian Army recently.

**Journalist:** Aren't you saying exactly what Mr Erdogan would say to me about the SDF?

**President Assad:** About them?? actually, Erdogan, has his own agenda which is two parts; his own agenda as a Muslim brotherhood, and the American agenda as a puppet. So it is two parts, but they worked in tandem, these two agendas. But at the same time, those groups of PYD gave him the excuse and the reason to invade Syria, that does not mean the invasion is legal. It is illegal in every sense of the word. But, they gave him the pretext, because he has been announcing for years that he wanted to invade the northern part of Syria, and he wanted to clean that area from the "terrorists" and he means the PYD. They kept giving him this excuse, that's what happened. That's why they were to be blamed but Erdogan is invader.

**Journalist:** Okay, but do not you see how NATO or some people in NATO powers may think that the one thing we do not want is peace between Ankara and Damascus? And you are participating in that divide and rule, a system that has been designed in western capitals—no chance of any meetings with Mr. Erdogan?

**President Assad:** With him, it is not raised to meet him. I do not think while somebody is occupying your land will be the preferred one to meet with. We had some few meetings .....

**Journalist:** You negotiate with your enemies, not your friends?

**President Assad:** Yes, we are, but not with Erdogan, not me with him. No. It is on the security level; it happened through the Russians. It was a tripartite meeting; it happened two or three times. It led nowhere. So we are not against the principles to negotiate with enemies, especially when we do not consider the Turks as enemies. The Turkish people are our neighbors, and we have a common history, and we cannot make them the enemy. The enemy is Erdogan and his policy and his coteries. So, to be against those groups in Turkey and in Syria that does not mean that we see eye to eye in another aspect, especially after he invaded Syria, publicly and formally.

**Question 23:** You see countries that have taken policy decisions like Syria, and I mention Palestinians, I mention historic support for what is seen as liberation movements in the Global South. They turn round to take up neoliberal economics. Last time I was here, all the talk in Damascus amongst your ministers in Damascus, they were talking about privatization. They were talking about elites in Syrian society, educated at business school like Harvard in the west, is that not the start of the Syrian conflict, when you started to implement neoliberal privatization plans destroying the fabric of this society?

**President Assad:** Actually, there was debate about privatization, and as a government, and as a state in general, we refused it; even the unions in Syria, the majority refused the Neo-liberal policies because we know that it is going to destroy the poor, that was before..

**Journalist:** Everyone was talking about it here in 2009.

**President Assad:** No. We moved steps towards liberation, but we still have public sector. Till this moment, actually, who protected the economy in Syria and the services, is the public sector. Without the public sector, we would not have survived this war. The role of the public sector, because we are socialist government.

**Journalist:** in name!

**President Assad:** No, actually we still have public sector, and we still support the poor, we still have subsidies of bread, of oil, of schools, everything, nearly free; education is free in Syria. So, we have not changed that policy but we opened the doors more for the private sector. So, you cannot call liberalization; you cannot call it.

**Question 24:** Was it a coincidence the conflict hit at that time just after your opening up the market.

**President Assad:** No, it is was not.

**Journalist:** Arguably, to corruption, more corruption?

**President Assad:** No, there was, let's say, explanation for the reason of the conflict; it does not have anything to do with this. It does not have anything. They said because there was four years of drought and the people become poorer, no, no.

**Journalist:** The Climate Change?

No, no, this is not the reason. This is not correct. These are explanations, just theoretical. In reality, the problem started when the money of Qatar came to Syria, and we had contact with many of the laborers, and we told them, why do not you come to your workshop, and they said in one hour we take as we take in one week. It was very simple. They paid them 50 dollars at the very beginning, then later 100 dollars a week which has enough for him to live without work, so it is much easier for him to join the demonstrations. After that it was much easier for them to take them towards having armaments and shooting, and before that we had very important .....

**Journalist:** I am sure the Qatari government would deny that?

**President Assad:** Of course, definitely.

**Question 25:** I mean because it was presented at the time, somewhat bizarrely for anyone arguably who knows about the Arab world's complexity of the Arab spring from the self-immolation of Bouazizi in Tunisia, is that connected to this conflict, the Arab spring, or is that.

**President Assad:** Of course, there is. There is interaction in this region because you know the same culture, the same background, the same circumstances, somehow, not completely. Some of the demonstrations at the very beginning were peaceful, to be frank; not every demonstration was infiltrated by militants. No, that is not true. In some areas, yes. Some people wanted to go because they wanted to improve their situation. Some people, they have their own ideas about improving, let's say, the political system, more freedom, different slogans they said or they used in those demonstrations. Yes. So, that was mainly by the influence of what happened in other countries like new trend. But that not why it continued. That's why the same people that I'm talking about, they stopped participating in the demonstrations when the shooting started and the extremists started infiltrating, especially the Muslim brotherhood who started leading the demonstrations with Allah Akbar, and using religious slogans in order to give this religious and sometimes sectarian mantle to put this mantle on the demonstrations.

**Question 26:** Something like that could be happening in Lebanon?

**President Assad:** Lebanon is a sectarian country; we all know that. Because they have a sectarian constitution. In Syria, we do not have a sectarian constitution, so it did not work.

**Journalist:** But I meant the outside influences?

**President Assad:** Of course, no one will leave spontaneous demonstration to be spontaneous, but where would it go? That depends on the awareness of the people.

**Question 27:** I am going to ask you about the reconstruction. Some people are saying that you are going to be too dependent on China, on Iran. The estimate was 230 billion dollars, I do not know how they calculate these things, do you expect now to see massive reconstruction? Is that what is going to happen now?

**President Assad:** Not very soon, because you know there is an embargo on Syria, and the American tried hard during the last two years to not allow any individual, not only companies, who wants to invest in Syria to come. They said you are under embargo right away. So, many capitals fear coming to Syria because of that embargo. But it is not the biggest problem. For the human resources, we have the human resources enough to build our country, we do not need any human resources. We can build it gradually, so I would not worry about `this embargo, but definitely, the friendly countries like China, Russia and Iran, will have priority in this rebuilding.

**Journalist:** Not European Union Countries?!

**President Assad:** Every country which stood against Syria will not have a chance to be part of this reconstruction.

**Journalist:** No British Trade deal?!

**President Assad:** Definitely not.

**Question 28:** Do you think, actually and it has been raised, that the return of terrorists, as you call them, mass immigration that occurred after the Libyan war and after the Syrian war, they affected BREXIT because of immigration to Europe?

**President Assad:** Of course, the far-right has been influenced by this to his own interest. Of course, I am talking about the far-right. The most important thing – not the political aspect of it – the change in the society, how much Europe is ready, can, or able to integrate those immigrants in their society. Even before that, mass immigration during the last ten years to Europe, they had a problem in integrating the immigrants in their society. Now, you have this problem and they have the terrorism that inflicted France and the UK and other countries. They would be affected because parts of those immigrants are the extremists and the terrorists and the people who do not want to integrate. They want to go there just because they want to leave this region for different reasons, security, economy ...

**Journalist:** And there will be no security collaboration to help these countries?

**President Assad:** No, there is none, and we are not ready. We said very clearly that we are not going to help any country in security while they work against Syria in every aspect, economy, security and in their politics

**Journalist:** The head of MI6 on his opening speech, Alex Younger, said that you and Putin “They make a desert and call it peace. The human tragedy is heart-breaking.”

**President Assad:** Any British official is in no position to talk about the humanitarian aspect anywhere in the world; they have been part of the invasion in Iraq; they have been partner in killing more than 1.5 million Iraqis; they have been partner in attacking Syria with their missiles and the embargo Syria, and killing hundreds of thousands of Syrians, and at the end, they are American puppets. They are not independent, to be frank. So, they are in no position to talk about the humanitarian issues anywhere in the world, let alone their history in India in the past; forget about this colonial era, I am talking about their current in modern history. They are not in a position.

**Question 29:** Well, just finally then, What about the election here? Is there going to be a general election in 2021 in Syria?

**President Assad:** Definitely.

**Journalist:** And will be there more than one person on the ballot?

**President Assad:** Last time, We were three and this time, of course, we are going to have as much as they want to nominate. There are going to be numerous nominees.

**Journalist:** Mr. President. Thank you.

**President Assad:** Thank you.