

UK Foreign Secretary and French Foreign Minister: Assad cannot be Syria's future

 gov.uk/government/speeches/uk-foreign-secretary-and-french-foreign-minister-assad-cannot-be-syrias-future

Written on:

27 February 2015



From the palace where he is hunkered down, Bashar al-Assad is not just waging a war against his own people; he is also fighting to improve his public image.

In the Western media, he is using the terror created by the extremists to present himself as a partner for us against chaos. Some appear to be swayed by this argument, saying that in the face of extremism, Assad's injustice and dictatorship is preferable to disorder.

In reality, Assad is himself stoking injustice, disorder and extremism, and France and UK are standing firm together against all three.

This is why we should be deeply sceptical about Assad's apparent agreement to stop shelling a civilian area of Aleppo for six weeks, brokered by the UN Envoy Staffan De Mistura. We welcome the dedication and effort of Mr De Mistura, and we all want to see a sustainable and genuine reduction in violence. But Assad's past actions mean we cannot take his words at face value.

Assad has conducted the civil war in barbaric fashion. There is a list of war crimes and crimes against humanity, supposedly in the name of the fight against terrorism, but committed as part of a systematic regime policy.

We should not forget the use of chemical weapons, the indiscriminate use of violence against Syrian civilians, and the horrific images of torture and murder in Assad's jails revealed to the world by the regime defector known as Caesar.

The reality is that Assad is considerably weaker than a year ago, and growing weaker still. His army is depleted, with increasing desertions by its own soldiers, and forced to recruit mercenaries from as far away as Asia. He is beholden to his regional sponsors who, like Hezbollah, are the power behind the throne in Syria.

Assad no longer controls his own country, having lost territory in the North, where the moderate opposition groups are fighting bravely. In the East, he is offering no resistance to ISIL. In the West, Al-Qaeda affiliates have set up. Assad's own borders are infiltrated on all sides.

Proposing Assad as a solution to the extremists is to misunderstand the causes of the extremism. After 220,000 deaths and millions of displaced persons, we would be foolish to assume that a majority of Syrians would willingly agree to live under the control of their tormentor. And for us to dash their hopes of a better future for Syria without Assad would only serve to make many Syrians even more radicalised, pushing moderate people towards extremism rather than the reverse, and consolidating a jihadi stronghold in Syria.

For our own national security we have to defeat ISIL in Syria. We need a partner in Syria to work with against the extremists, and this means a political settlement agreed between the Syrian parties leading to a unity government in Syria. This will likely include parts of the existing regime structures, the National Coalition, and others with a moderate and inclusive vision for Syria, respecting Syria's different communities. It is clear to us that Assad could not credibly be part of any such administration.

This transition would allow the Syrian people to regain hope for the future, and for us to tackle the root causes of ISIL. This is where we are focussing our political efforts. It is not an easy task, and we must all play our part in our own way. But France and the United Kingdom will spare no effort to achieve this goal.

Further information

UK and France

Follow the Foreign Secretary on twitter [@PHammondMP](#)

Follow the Foreign Office on twitter [@foreignoffice](#)

Media enquiries

For journalists

Email newsdesk@fco.gov.uk