

President's Remarks to the UN Press Corps at the 69th UN General Assembly

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Remarks

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President of the Syrian Coalition

New York, USA

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Thank you for joining us.

I would like just to give a brief about the situation that may answer many of your questions.

The world faces a grave threat from the extremist group ISIS. It is a global threat that has spilled out from Syria to Iraq, the region and the world. It poses a significant domestic security risk to the US and to the West. It must be tackled and must be tackled in Syria.

This is the number one issue at the UN General Assembly this year and is the focus of my trip and meetings this week.

But this extremism is not a new phenomenon. Syrians have endured the horrors perpetrated by ISIS for more than a year – in addition to the three and a half years of unparalleled brutality at the hands of the Assad regime itself. We, and our affiliated armed groups on the ground, the Free Syrian Army, have been fighting terror on two fronts – ISIS and the regime – at the same time with very little help from the international community.

The Free Syrian Army started its fight against ISIS from the first quarter of this year. The opposition coalition announced its position on ISIS from September 2013, a year ago, while nobody in the international community had a clear position on ISIS at that time. We continue our fight. We were successful in pushing them back from major northern cities in Syria from Maarrat al-Nu'man and from the Idlib area, from Aleppo, and most recently, two months ago, from the suburbs of Damascus, especially from the eastern Ghouta area. But no army can sustain a fight on two fronts indefinitely without support.

I have come to New York on behalf of all Syrians to convey a message: to defeat ISIS, the international community must join our fight. But we want them to understand that it is their fight too. They must work with us: the only inclusive, moderate political group

in Syria, on a coordinated approach to defeat ISIS militarily, remove its root cause – the Assad regime itself – and put in place the moderate governance that will ensure there can be no resurgence of extremism.

I am encouraging our partners in the international community to work with us on a systematic and comprehensive approach.

First, militarily defeat ISIS everywhere. We must begin airstrikes in Syria immediately. As we speak, hundreds of thousands of civilians in northern Syria, in the Kobane area and the Ayn al Arab area, are trapped in a brutal siege by ISIS. Time is of the essence to avert a catastrophe. We are ready to coordinate with our allies to maximize the impact of air strikes against ISIS. Hitting them in Iraq alone will not work if they can continue to operate, regroup, train, and plan inside Syria. Every day that passes without airstrikes in Syria allows ISIS the opportunity for more growth and more terror.

Second, strengthen our moderate forces on the ground. We share the same goals and values. We have already been fighting ISIS with some success. But we need help – training and more sophisticated weapon systems. Our forces are the best way to avoid US or any foreign boots on the ground. Nobody wants that.

Third, the Assad regime is the root cause of extremism. So it has to be defeated alongside ISIS. The regime's brutality, repression and lawlessness created the conditions in which extremism can flourish. Further, its deliberate policies of releasing extremist leaders from jail, opening its borders with Iraq, and buying oil from ISIS itself have helped the threat grow. We will continue to lead the fight against the regime on the ground. I urge our international partners to help us by increasing the pressure on the regime so it is compelled to accept the internationally-agreed political transition it has rejected previously in Geneva talks: more effective sanctions against the regime and its backers and efforts to disrupt Iranian weapons and fuel supplies.

We cannot win this fight through airstrikes, weapons and training alone. They won't defeat the threat for good. For that, there must be moderate Syrian governance to ensure extremism and its root causes cannot return. But to govern, we need protection from the regime's aerial bombardment in areas we control – either by supplying sophisticated air-defence weaponry or by imposing a limited no fly zone.

The Syrian National Coalition is the moderate, inclusive, democratic answer. We're asking the international community to join our coalition against the two forces terrorizing Syria: the Assad regime and ISIS.

I will take questions.