

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY’S POSITION ON SYRIAN PRESIDENT BASHAR AL – ASSAD

This chart contrasts international leaders’ positions on Assad before and after mainstream media coverage of Russia’s deployment of aircraft to Syria, marked here as September 4, 2015. Several leaders softened their stance on the Syrian leader following Russian intervention, undermining the United States’ stated goal of achieving a negotiated political solution in which Assad is not in power.

Prior to Mainstream Media Coverage of Russian deployment (04 SEP 2015)	After Mainstream Media Coverage of Russian Deployment
United States	
<p>Defense Secretary Ash Carter:</p> <p>10 JUL: “Syria...has the government of Assad, who has to go.” (DoD)</p> <p>Secretary of State John Kerry:</p> <p>03 AUG: “We believe that Assad and the Assad regime long ago lost legitimacy... We continue to support the moderate Syrian opposition.” (state.gov)</p> <p>US Special Envoy for Syria Michael Ratney:</p> <p>28 AUG (readout from trip to Moscow): The United States remains strongly committed to achieving a genuine, negotiated political transition away from Bashar al-Assad... Assad has proven through his brutal and repressive tactics that he has lost all legitimacy, and he must go. (State.gov)</p>	<p>Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook:</p> <p>15 SEP: “We continue to believe that support for the Assad regime -- military support is counterproductive to that effort.” (DoD)</p> <p>Defense Secretary Ash Carter:</p> <p>24 SEP: “The U.S. and Russia share two interests: the lasting defeat of ISIL and a political transition from the Assad regime.” (DoD)</p> <p>Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman:</p> <p>25 SEP: “We do not think it is credible for Assad to remain for any length of time as the leader...we appreciate there may be a political solution here where Assad is there for some period of time in some capacity while a transition takes place.” (Reuters)</p> <p>Secretary of State John Kerry:</p> <p>27 SEP: “All of the efforts need to be coordinated... to find a way forward that will be effective in keeping a united, secular Syria that can be at peace and stable again without foreign troops present.” (State.gov)</p> <p>President Obama:</p> <p>28 SEP: “There cannot be... a return to the pre-war status quo. And so Assad and his allies cannot simply pacify the broad majority of a population who have been brutalized by chemical weapons and indiscriminate bombing...realism also requires a managed transition away from Assad and to a new leader.” (Politico)</p> <p>Secretary of State John Kerry, on the meeting between President Barack Obama and President Vladimir Putin:</p> <p>29 SEP: “There’s an agreement that Syria should be a unified country, united, that it needs to be secular, that ISIL needs to be taken on and that there needs to be a managed transition [from current President Bashar Assad]... And we are looking for a way to try to get to a point where we can manage a transition and have agreement on the outcome...” (Politico)</p>

Australia	
<p>Foreign Minister Julie Bishop:</p> <p>30 AUG: “Any attacks by the Coalition should not be seen as support for Assad.. his regime has been horrendous in its behaviour.” (Julie Bishop)</p> <p>02 SEP: “The Assad regime...is not considered legitimate because it used chemical weapons against its own people.” (Julie Bishop)</p>	<p>Foreign Minister Julie Bishop:</p> <p>25 SEP: “There is an emerging view in some quarters that the only conceivable option would be a national unity government involving President Assad...the fact is we need a political solution.” (The Australian)</p>
European Union	
France	
<p>President Francois Hollande:</p> <p>25 AUG: “We must reduce the terrorist influence without maintaining Assad. The two are bound up together. ” (AFP)</p>	<p>Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius:</p> <p>27 SEP: “France is talking with everyone and excluding no one [...] all concerned parties” must be included, but “the future of Syria cannot include Bashar Assad.” (AP)</p> <p>President Francois Hollande:</p> <p>28 SEP: “No initiative, no matter where it comes from, could make us believe that we should go back to the old regime, the one that provoked this tragedy.” (WSJ)</p>
Germany	
<p>Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier:</p> <p>18 MAR: “The only way to an end to the violence is via negotiations for a political solution, even if that makes talks with the Assad regime necessary.” (Reuters)</p> <p>Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen:</p> <p>15 AUG: Released statement claiming that ISIS posed the primary threat in Syria, rather than the Assad Regime. (UPI, Spiegel)</p>	<p>Chancellor Angela Merkel:</p> <p>24 SEP: “We have to speak with many actors, this includes Assad, but others as well.” (AFP)</p> <p>Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier:</p> <p>27 SEP: “We must find a common interest between the different positions, between those who would absolutely talk with Bashar al-Assad, and those who say, ‘we will not discuss anything until he departs’.” He sought to nuance Chancellor Merkel’s earlier comments, saying that Merkel “did not say she or the German government would speak with Assad”, but that could fall to UN mediator Staffan de Mistura. (AFP)</p> <p>27 SEP: Steinmeier told German TV that the formation of a transitional Syrian government should be kept separate from discussions on the future of President Assad.(Reuters)</p>

United Kingdom

Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond (in a joint statement with French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius):

27 FEB: “**Proposing Assad as a solution to the extremists is to misunderstand the causes of the extremism.**” (RT)

Prime Minister David Cameron:

27 SEP: “[Assad] can’t play a part in the future of Syria and that position hasn’t changed. Obviously conversations about how we bring about that transition are very important.” (Sky News, Reuters, Guardian)

Regional Actors

Turkey

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan:

03 AUG: [of Vladimir Putin] “**I believe he can give up Assad.**” (AFP)

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan:

24 SEP: “Either a **transition process without al-Assad, or with al-Assad, is possible.** But what is required is the opposition ... **Nobody can foresee Syria’s future with al-Assad.**” (Hurriyet)

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu:

28 SEP: “We have the conviction that with al-Assad in charge during the transition...this situation would turn into a permanent status quo. Our conviction on this matter hasn’t changed.” (Hurriyet)

Israel

Minister of Defense Moshe Ya’alon:

20 JUL: “**We must prevent the evil powers, including the merciless terror regime of Iran, Assad regime, Hezbollah, Hamas and the global Islamic jihad, for further igniting the already inflamed Middle East.**” (DoD)

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu:

21 SEP: Netanyahu called **talks with Putin “substantive”** —noting that both countries had agreed to “**a joint mechanism for preventing misunderstandings between our forces” in and around Syria.**”(CNN)

Saudi Arabia

Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir:

11 AUG: “The **Bashar al-Assad issue is solved. He has no future in Syria.**” (Russia & CIS Military Weekly)

King Salman:

26 SEP: **Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke to Saudi Arabia’s King Salman about finding a solution** to the Syria crisis. According to the Kremlin’s official website, Putin and Salman “exchanged views on regional security matters, first and foremost, in the context of finding ways to settle the conflict in Syria.” (Gulf News)

Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir:

29 SEP: “**There is no future for Assad in Syria.**” (Guardian)

Egypt

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi:

30 MAR: Urged a political solution to the Syrian war, and emphasized the **need to prevent the collapse of Syrian state institutions.** (AFP)

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi:

28 SEP: **“Bashar and the Syrian opposition, this is something that can be handled.** But what cannot be handled ... is that whole country falls into the hands of these terrorist groups.” (CNN)

Assad Regime Allies

Iran

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif:

07 SEP: **“Those who have set a condition about the Syrian president in the past two years should be blamed for the continued war.”** (VICE)

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif:

28 SEP: **“Everyone has accepted that President Assad must remain** so that we can combat the terrorists.” (AFP)

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani:

28 SEP: Expressed in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly that **Iran is ready to assist in tackling terrorism and to bring about democracy in Syria and Yemen, via elections** rather than arms. (Guardian)

Russia

President Vladimir Putin:

03 SEP: **“We really want to create some kind of an international coalition to fight terrorism and extremism... We are also working with our partners in Syria.** In general, the understanding is that this **uniting of efforts in fighting terrorism should go in parallel to some political process in Syria itself.**” (Reuters)

President Vladimir Putin:

28 SEP: **“We think it is an enormous mistake to refuse to cooperate with the Syrian government... We should finally acknowledge that no one but President Assad’s armed forces and Kurds (ph) militias are truly fighting the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria.”** (Washington Post)

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