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## 'West Is More Confident in Al-Qaida than Me'

### Assad Interview

10/5/2013

**In an interview with SPIEGEL, Syrian President Assad continues to describe the rebels as terrorists, accuses the West of lies and maintains that he is only seeking to defend his country. The leader also admits mistakes.**

In an interview to be published in the Monday issue of SPIEGEL, Syrian President Bashar Assad speaks out about inspections of his country's chemical weapons, possible new elections and the role of Germany, the United States and Russia in his country's crisis. He also continues to vehemently deny any role in chemical weapons attacks on civilians and the armed opposition.

"We did not use chemical weapons," he tells the magazine. "This is a misstatement. So is the picture you paint of me as a man who kills his own people."

He also expresses doubts about the United Nations report on the Aug. 21 chemical weapons attack. "No one can say with certainty that rockets were used," he says. Instead, he accuses the rebels themselves of using Sarin gas.

Addressing the chemical weapons inspections now beginning in Syria, he says: "We're very transparent. The experts can go to every site. They are going to have all the data from our government." Until the weapons are destroyed, they will remain "under full control," he adds.

## **'I Would Like to See Envoys from Germany'**

Assad also criticizes the international community. "It seems to me that the West is more confident in al-Qaida than me," he says. As for US President Barack Obama, he says: "The only thing he has is lies." In contrast, he describes the Russians as "our real friends," adding that they "understand the reality here much better."

Assad also suggests that Germany could act as a mediator in the conflict. "I would like to see envoys from Germany come to Syria to discuss the reality," he says.

The Syrian president also admits that his army has cooperated with Hezbollah in fighting that has taken place in areas on the border with Lebanon.

Asked if he believes a solution to the Syrian crisis could still be negotiated, he counters, "With the militants? No. Because by its very definition, a political opposition doesn't have an army."

Assad also raises the prospect of early elections before his term as president expires in August 2014. "I'm not in a position to say right now whether I will run or not," he says. "If I no longer know that I have the will of the people behind me, then I will not run."

He also concedes, "There were personal mistakes made by individuals. Every human makes mistakes. A president also makes mistakes." One can't just say "they did everything and we did nothing, 100 percent and zero percent," he adds. Reality has "shades of gray."

Finally, addressing the potential outcome of the Syrian conflict, Assad says: "We don't have any other option than to believe in our victory." The Syrian leader says he also doesn't have any fears about his own well-being. "If I were afraid," he says, "I would have left Syria a long time ago."