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Iran: ‘The removal of Assad is a red line for us’

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Iran's top international advisor said that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad should remain until the end of his term -- in 2021 -- warning that any demands for his removal would amount to a crossing of Tehran's "red line."

Ali Akbar Velayati, a former foreign minister who is now Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's top international adviser, also said that Iranian involvement in Syria and Iraq is none of America's business.

"Iran believes that the government of Bashar al-Assad should remain in power until the end of the presidency term and the removal of Assad is a red line for us," Velayati said, according Press TV website.

Russia and Iran have remained staunch backers of the embattled Syrian president's regime, while the US and its allies – including Turkey which has been most vocal – demand that he must step down.

Since 2,000, Assad has been “elected” multiple times for seven-year terms – the last in 2014. That means his current term ends in 2021, but opposition groups that have been fighting to overthrow him for five years are unwilling to countenance his staying on until then.

Velayati, who was speaking in a televised interview, also commented on US policy in the Middle East, declaring it as a failure. He said US authorities cannot tolerate Iran's influence in countries like Iraq and Syria – where Tehran has troops and advisors.

“At the request of these governments (Iraq and Syria), we support them (in their fight) against terrorists and it is none of the Americans' business to say anything in this regard,” Velayati declared.