

# *Syrian President Bashar al-Assad Says Army Will Liberate Every Inch of His Country*

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Damascus, January 9 (RHC)-- Syrian President Bashar al-Assad says the armed forces will fight until the liberation of "every inch" of his country from militant and extremist groups.

Assad made the remarks in a statement given to French media, the full version of which was published by the official Syrian Arab News Agency on Monday. "Of course it's our mission, according to the constitution and according to the laws, that we have to liberate every inch of the Syrian land," he said.

Assad had been asked whether the country had any plans to liberate Raqqa from the Daesh Takfiri terror group, which has named the northern city as its so-called headquarters in the Arab country.

"We do not consider that (retaking Aleppo from the militants) as a victory because victory will be when we have eliminated all the terrorists," Assad said, adding however, that "it is a critical moment in this war because we are on the path to victory."

The Syrian president also said that his country's delegation was prepared "to negotiate everything" in the upcoming talks with the opposition, which is to be held in the Kazakh capital of Astana with the mediation

of Russia, Turkey and Iran.

Asked if the government was ready to discuss Assad's position as president, he answered affirmatively, saying that his position is linked to the constitution. He added: "If they want to discuss this point, they must discuss the constitution."

The Syrian head of state also said any constitutional matter should be put to a referendum, adding that he would willingly step down if the results of a public referendum on his continued tenure obliged him to do so. "The president is related to the ballot box. If they (the Syrian people) don't need him, let's go to the ballot box."

Late last year, the Syrian army managed to liberate the eastern sector of Aleppo, the country's second-largest city, which had fallen to Takfiri groups back in 2012. Government forces later secured the evacuation of remaining civilians and armed groups from the city under a ceasefire deal with the militant groups, brokered by Russia and Turkey.

The Aleppo deal set the stage for a landmark all-Syria truce deal between Damascus and foreign-backed militant groups operating in the country. The diplomatic achievements were made following high-level trilateral talks involving Russia, Iran and Turkey over the Syria crisis in Moscow.

President Assad had earlier hailed the victory in Aleppo as "history in the making" and "a huge step" in bringing the war in Syria to an end.

Assad, however, insisted that the opposition side attending the Astana talks had to have "grassroots in Syria, not Saudi one or French one or British one -- it should be Syrian opposition to discuss the Syrian issues." He said that the West, mainly the United States, and the Persian Gulf monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar have been generously supporting the militants fighting against the Syrian government.

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