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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: Syria's Assad warns of "earthquake" if West intervenes (Reuters)

Syria's Assad warns of "earthquake" if West intervenes-paper

(Adds detail, background)

LONDON, Oct 29 (Reuters) - Western powers risk causing an "earthquake" that would burn the Middle East if they intervene in Syria, President Bashar al-Assad said in an interview with Britain's Sunday Telegraph newspaper.

Assad has drawn repeated condemnation from the United Nations, Arab League and Western governments for the violent manner in which he has attempted to crush a seven-month uprising against his rule.

Assad said in the interview that Western countries "are going to ratchet up the pressure, definitely", adding: "but Syria is different in every respect from Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen. The history is different. The politics is different".

"Syria is the hub now in this region. It is the fault line, and if you play with the ground you will cause an earthquake," he said.

"Do you want to see another Afghanistan, or tens of Afghanistans? Any problem in Syria will burn the whole region. If the plan is to divide Syria, that is to divide the whole region," Assad added.

The U.N. estimates that 3,000 people, including nearly 200 children, have been killed in the unrest. Since the start of protests in March, Syrian authorities have blamed the violence on gunmen they say have killed 1,100 soldiers and police.

Syria has barred most international media, making it hard to verify accounts from activists and authorities.

Assad said that Syrian authorities had made "many mistakes" in the early part of the uprising, but that the situation had now improved.

Assad said he had responded differently to the Arab Spring than other, deposed Arab leaders. "We didn't go down the road of stubborn government," he said.

"Six days after (the protests began), I commenced reform. People were sceptical that the reforms were an opiate for the people, but when we started announcing the reforms, the problems started decreasing..This is when the tide started to turn. This is when people started supporting the government," Assad told the Sunday Telegraph.

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