

**RELEASE IN PART
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From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, April 18, 2012 2:13 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Julian Assange debuts new talk show on Russia Today TV with Hezbollah leader

FYI

From: Russell, Daniel A
Sent: Wednesday, April 18, 2012 01:42 PM
To: Gordon, Philip H; Sullivan, Jacob J
Cc: Kaidanow, Tina S; Logsdon, Kent D
Subject: Julian Assange debuts new talk show on Russia Today TV with Hezbollah leader

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MOSCOW (Reuters) - Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah told a Russian television channel on Tuesday that his Syria-backed group had tried to act as a mediator in the Syrian conflict but failed to persuade the opposition to come to the negotiating table. Nasrallah made the remarks on the Kremlin-funded English language television station during the first broadcast of a new talk show hosted by WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. "We contacted the opposition to encourage them and to facilitate the process of dialogue with the regime," said Nasrallah, speaking through a translator via a video link from a secret location. "But they rejected dialogue."

Hezbollah, a political and militant Shi'ite group, has backed President Bashar al-Assad's crackdown on a mostly Sunni-led uprising which they blame on foreign-backed militants. In remarks broadcast on Tuesday, Nasrallah said al Qaeda fighters had joined the opposition and sought to turn Syria "into a battleground". He also attacked "certain" Arab countries who he said were encouraging the opposition to fight. His group, which fought a war with Israel in 2006, believes the West seeks to reshape the Middle East by replacing Assad with a ruler friendly to Israel. It has however praised uprisings elsewhere in the Arab world.

Nasrallah was the first guest on Assange's much-anticipated interview show, The World Tomorrow, on Russia's RT channel. Currently under house arrest in Britain, Australian-born Assange is fighting extradition to Sweden for questioning on an alleged sexual assault. After the Hezbollah interview, Assange told the channel he had chosen the Russian channel, which says it has a broad international reach, because he wanted his critical views to reach the American audience. "Unfortunately, the majority of big networks in the United States are now not capable of effectively criticising the abuse of U.S. military power," Assange said. He dismissed suggestions the channel's connection to the Kremlin undermined his editorial freedom.

Assange, 40, infuriated the U.S. government in 2010 when WikiLeaks released secret video footage and thousands of U.S. diplomatic cables about the U.S.-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Russia's Vladimir Putin, once described in the cables as an "alpha dog" presiding over a "mafia state", condemned Assange's arrest, and the WikiLeaks founder has since received a sympathetic coverage in Kremlin-controlled media.