Minister of State Hoyer on the situation in Syria (interview)

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Minister of State Werner Hoyer talks about the current situation in Syria. This interview was broadcast on 2 August 2011 on the ARD breakfast show “Morgenmagazin”

Mr Hoyer, is a Syrian protester worth less than a Libyan rebel?

No, of course not – that’s why we applied for a

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Security Council session to address the issue, which was then held yesterday. The session lasted half the night, and it will reconvene today to continue working on the subject, as there is now a little movement from those who have previously been very hesitant about having the

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issue a declaration. This is a very good thing, in view of what the Security Council was told yesterday by the representative of the

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’s political section, who again made very clear how far the use of violence in Syria exceeds what we have seen before or indeed could have imagined.

Nonetheless, while there has been an international military response to the Libyan situation, such action is not even being considered in the case of Syria, at least not at the present moment. Why is that?

It certainly isn’t being discussed, and that is because the opposition forces in Syria are very keen for us not to discuss it. They are afraid that any intervention on our part would play into the hands of members of the regime who already claim that what is happening in Syria is an international operation being led solely from outside the country, rather than stemming from the Syrian people themselves. Yet since it is the Syrian people who hold the reins of the revolutionary movement, we should respect that wish.

If I can just pick you up on that – it isn't officially being discussed, but it is something that is being thought about?

There are no limits to what can be thought about, but I would advise against bringing a military operation to the fore in our considerations at this point. I think we are always a little too quick to turn to the military. What we need to remember is that, quite apart from the legal issues, we had a decision taken by the African Union and the Arab League in the case of Libya. There is no equivalent for Syria. The conflict situation we have there also has the potential to take on a massive scale. We should therefore be very, very careful. Intervention is simply not on the cards right now.

Nevertheless, the German Government has not even called for Syria's President Assad to step down. Do you really want to carry on working with that man after all this is over?

No, of course we don't. I don't see that Assad has a future either, but it is the Syrian people who need to decide who they want leading their country.

You weren't so reticent with Libya; the Government did call for the President there to step down.

The people of Libya made their wishes very clear. The people of Syria have yet to have the opportunity.

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is now freezing the accounts of 35 members of the Syrian regime. Travel bans are being put in place. Do you think that you are really getting to the regime with measures like these?

I think these measures do have an effect. They certainly still need to be extended further, something the European Union will now be doing very rapidly. What is important though, is that all the measures, including economic sanctions, that need to be considered have more of an effect the more countries get involved. That is why it is so important that we get the more hesitant members of the Security Council on side to pursue this path with us. I get the impression that those – apart from Russia and China – which have expressed reservations are now making a move after all. I am talking here about South Africa, Brazil and India. We should encourage this. Sanctions are only effective when plenty of countries join in. For example, we import 1% of our oil from Syria. Blocking that amount of trade has no effect, but if everyone blocked their imports, and Syria couldn't sell its oil to anyone around the world, then the effect would be enormous.

Just briefly, could you tell us what support you are providing to the people in Syria who are, as we speak, risking their lives in the name of freedom?

We are in very close contact with the protesters and the opposition movement in Syria, and we aren’t going to reveal any more details in public than absolutely necessary. That would be just what Assad wants, and it would be to the detriment of the people we are trying to help.

This interview was conducted by Till Nassif.

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