Syria: Istanbul summit, “transition strategy” – toward new sanctions. Involve Russia but not Iran, says Terzi

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Something has shifted on the diplomatic front with regard to the Syrian crisis. Today’s meeting of the Friends of Syria in Istanbul produced a “transition strategy” backed by new sanctions and the involvement of Russia (but not Iran) in stopping the ongoing bloodbath in that Arab country.

While the Russian-Chinese summit in Beijing announced its proposal for an international conference to ensure implementation of the Annan plan.

Clinton: Assad must leave the country

Speaking from Istanbul, American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton launched the “Yemen model”, as an example of a possible approach to transition in Syria. “It took a lot of effort and a lot of pressure”, she said in a press conference at the end of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, “but in the end President Saleh stepped down”. In the same way, Syrian President Bashar al Assad “must relinquish power and leave the country to make way for a transition toward democratic institutions”, Mrs. Clinton added, explaining that the U.S. was ready to work with Russia on a possible conference on the Syrian transition. On the other hand, she expressed her doubts about the Russian-Chinese proposal to invite Iran as well. “The general opinion is that that idea doesn’t make sense”, Terzi reported from Istanbul, “because it would mean involving one of the parties to the dispute”.

Terzi: risk of genocide is intervention is not rapid

The immediate priority is to stop the bloodbath. The opposition has accused the regime of another massacre in the region of Hama, where hundreds of civilians are said to have been killed. “The strategy chosen by Damascus risks leading to genocide if intervention is not rapid” warned Terzi, as he represented Italy at a diplomatic summit in Istanbul with the ministers of the principal members of the Friends of Syria: the U.S., Italy, France, the UK and Germany.

Moscow not opposed to Assad stepping down

Something has also changed in Moscow’s strategy. Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov made it known for the first time that Moscow had “never said” that Assad “had to necessarily

remain in power until the end of the political process”. A clear appeal came from the Istanbul summit – called by Turkey on Italy’s urging – for Russia’s involvement, which Terzi described as “an essential partner”, citing “signs that Moscow’s support for the Assad regime is not a foregone conclusion”.

Next summit in France

France announced it would host the next summit on 6 July in Paris. A military intervention, based on the UN-mandated on in Libya, appears to have been ruled out for the time being. But the U.S. and the Arab League are pressing the UN to issue a new set of sanctions against the Assad regime in keeping with Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter. The Arab League made a formal proposal to that effect specifying that military action be ruled out for the moment.

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