There are no military short-cuts in Syria, says Terzi (l'Unità)

2012-10-16

"There is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. And a political solution will necessarily involve Russia. This is still an uphill road, but it's an essential step if the peace-keeping mission that Italy has been calling for is to take place". The point was made by Foreign Minister Giulio Terzi, who was interviewed by L'Unità on his return from a meeting of the EU Foreign Ministers Council in Luxembourg.

Minister, the UN and Arab League's Special Envoy for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, is thinking of a peace-keeping mission to Syria. What's Italy's position on that?

"Italy was calling for a significant peace-keeping mission in Syria, and I was too, well before Brahimi. And we continue to call for such a mission. But for a mission to take place, we need the go-ahead from the United Nations Security Council, as happened with Lebanon. And that will necessarily involve Russia in seeking a political solution to the crisis".

An uphill path…

"Sadly, that's the case. But it's a path we must take. There was much discussion of Syria the other evening, at the meeting in Luxembourg with the Russian Foreign Minister, Serghei Lavrov. The starting point is for all of the Union's member states to agree that a political solution to the Syrian crisis must necessarily rest on the Action Plan. The plan set out in Geneva and accepted by the USA, Russia and the European countries.

We'd do well to remember that the plan envisages a halt to the violence and the opening of a transition process with the participation of all the main political forces in Syrian society. It also envisages the departure of Bashar al-Assad, though not necessarily of the entire regime – but certainly of the people most closely involved in this horrific bloodbath, which has now been going on for 19 months.

The point is that Assad's conduct, and that of the men closest to him, is continuing to increase the violence of the civil war, including that perpetrated by the armed opposition. In recent months, Jihadist elements have joined that opposition; they're not widespread, but are becoming entrenched in certain localities. As this conflict becomes chronic, the international

community feels increasingly impotent. So the question is: how can Brahimi breathe new life in to the Geneva Plan?"

And here Russia's role comes back into play. What's the news on that?

"At the meeting in Luxembourg, Lavrov confirmed Russia's commitment to the Geneva Plan. But at the same time he gave the impression that he no longer saw Bashar al-Assad's departure from the scene as an immediate objective. Many observers have read this as Moscow back-stepping on the transition process set out in the Plan".

How should we read this back-stepping?

"We can make some informed guesses. Maybe it's because Moscow views Assad's departure, at least in the immediate term, as an impossible condition. Or maybe it's based on considerations more closely linked to Russia's vision of the transformation processes triggered by the Arab Spring. Moscow has a sense of underlying uncertainty over the shape these regimes will ultimately take, especially as regards regional security conditions.

The fact remains that seeking the terms of a more constructive and decisive involvement by Russia is an obligatory step if we're to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis. If that happens, a UN Security Council resolution has a real possibility of seeing the light of day. And the prospect of a robust observer mission, that is, equipped with sufficient personnel to ensure that the ceasefire is respected at the points of friction, starting with Aleppo, Homs and Daraa, could take concrete form.

In the meantime, it's right for the EU to take on the humanitarian emergency, which Italy will play its part in tackling. We especially need to address the conditions of the refugees, as Syria's neighbouring countries, starting with Turkey, have asked. It's important too to work, as Italy is doing, to build greater unity in the forces opposed to Assad. This is a necessary condition if a transition process that is agreed within Syria and at the international level is to be put in place.

In seeking a political solution to the Syrian crisis, Iran is often mentioned: the same country that the EU has subjected to new sanctions.

"Europe's, and Italy's, aim is to continue with the 'two-track' approach to bring Iran to the negotiating table. To talk seriously, and in concrete terms, about how to find a solution, along Security Council lines.

The message sent to Tehran is clear. We need to find a solution, rapidly, in order to end uranium enrichment at levels compatible with building nuclear weapons. Sanctions are a painful but necessary instrument to achieve this. And the repercussions on the Iranian economy testify to their effectiveness. Iran could act as an element of stability for the region,

as long as the cloud caused by uranium enrichment and its nuclear programme is swept away once and for all”.

From the Middle East to Africa. Today the 20th anniversary of the Peace Accords in Mozambique will be celebrated at the Farnesina. Can Mozambique be viewed as a model for the relationship between foreign policy and Development Cooperation?

“I’d say a very definite and proud ‘yes’. Mozambique really is a model of how our aid initiatives managed to support Italian foreign policy in a region that is crucial to the stability of an entire continent for Mozambique’s social and economic growth. I was on a mission to Maputo recently and I saw just how dynamic their image of Italy is, as a country that played this decisive role. Development Cooperation is a vital component, and increasingly so, of foreign policy”.

Source : https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2012/10/20121016_intervistaterzi_lunita/