Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary discusses events in Syria

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Andrew Marr: This morning the Friends of Syria conference is taking place in Istanbul. Estimates are that between nine and ten thousand people have died in Syria since the uprising against President Assad began and today's conference is attended by representatives from all over the world including Hillary Clinton from the United States and William Hague who has just come out of a meeting and joins me now. Mr Hague welcome. Can I, can I start by asking whether you bring any news about the international attempts to, to rein in President Assad and do something for the people who are suffering under his regime?

William Hague: Well some progress is being made. As you know Kofi Annan has put forward, he being the UN envoy and Arab League envoy, a six point plan which the Assad regime say they have accepted, a plan that would bring about a cease fire, humanitarian aid, a political process, free access for the media and so on.

Now they say they've accepted that but as with past plans that have been put to them they haven't yet implemented it on the ground so the killing goes on, the torture and oppression goes on. It remains a desperately grim situation.

What we have here this morning is seventy five nations together, that is the largest gathering by far that we've had on this terrible issue. We are stepping up our support for the opposition in Syria and, and they are better coordinated now than they were even a few weeks ago. We're working on coordinating our sanctions together and sending a clear message that there isn't an unlimited period of time for this, for the Kofi Annan process to work before many of the nations here want us to go back to the UN Security Council, some of them will call for arming the opposition if there isn't progress made.

AM: Because there's has been criticism hasn't there that the, the Kofi Annan project has given some sort of cover to the Assad regime, has given it time to try and finally crush the opposition in Homs and other places?

WH: Well it is important to have an attempt at such a process so yes absolutely there is that criticism and everything the Assad regime has done looks like stalling for time and trying to use that time. On the other hand what we, what is now being put to them is a plan from Kofi Annan supported by the whole United Nations Security Council, and this is an important point, it's supported by Russia and by China as well as by the more obvious countries; the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Arab League and so on.

And so if the Assad regime fails to go along with this plan and doesn't start implementing this on the ground then they are in defiance not only of what we have said but, but of what Russia and China have supported as well and that then may be a different situation at the UN Security Council from those we've faced over the last year.

AM: And yet we are in a situation where by the time all of this goes through it may be that the rebellion has been, has been utterly crushed. So many people have been killed, driven out, humiliated, injured and so on that, that there isn't, there isn't any possibility of the regime toppling.

WH: Well this is why it is an urgent process but I would say this; President Assad cannot crush the spirit of the Syrian people. The, one of the lessons of the Arab Spring is that if a dictatorial regime sets out to try to eliminate by force the desire for freedom and democracy of a very large part of their population then they will fail and that is why we remain convinced that this is a doomed regime. That is a question of time, a matter of time. And what we really want to see is a managed transition, a political transition to a plural democratic system in Syria, that's what Kofi Annan is setting out to try to negotiate so he does deserve our support but doesn't have an unlimited amount of time to do it.

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