RBB Inforadio interview with Foreign Minister Westerwelle on the situation in the Arab world

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Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle gave the following interview to RBB Inforadio on 25 March 2011. The questions were put by Michael Castritius:

Question: Libya has been bombed for just over a week now.

Does the current situation vindicate your scepticism?

Foreign Minister Westerwelle: It’s certainly becoming clearer every day that my scepticism wasn’t unfounded. But this is not about who’s right and who’s not. There are situations where we hope our own reservations will be proved wrong by a favourable turn of events. After all, we’re not neutral, we’re just as opposed to the Gaddafi system as others. However, we proposed other means and ways of tackling this problem. I’m very concerned by the argument put forward recently, also by our European partners, that this isn’t only about Libya and that other Arab rulers also have to be dealt with. I would caution against conducting a discussion now in Europe on embarking on a military intervention everywhere in North Africa or the Arab world where injustice prevails. I regard this as a very dangerous discussion which could have very serious consequences for the region and for the Arab world as a whole.

Question: You’ve also warned that anyone who launches such a military operation should also think about the outcome.

Namely, how to withdraw afterwards?

And above all, what will be the political consequences?

Is that actually a criticism directed at France, the US and Britain? Are you saying they haven’t considered the outcome?

I’m not criticizing anyone. We made our decision after weighing it up very carefully. We decided at the end of this process that German soldiers won’t take part in the war in Libya. We’ve been criticized for that. After all, it was a very difficult, a momentous decision. Other countries decided differently. I respect that. I’m absolutely certain that they don’t have any ulterior motives either. But, of course, we always have to take developments in other countries into consideration. There can only be a political solution in Libya. That’s my firm

belief. Therefore, when such a military operation is launched, we should always consider from the outset what's to happen once the military objectives have been achieved. Then a political solution has to be found. There's no doubt the dictator has to go. However, a political solution has to follow the military action. Now we have to work flat out to make this happen.

Question: And – as you've already indicated – we'll soon have to deal with similar situations in other countries.

Events in Syria in particular have escalated during the last few days.

The opposition in Syria says that dozens, perhaps more than a hundred people, have been killed by regime bullets directed against demonstrators.

The situation in Yemen is similar.

Today, Friday – the holy day for Muslims – large-scale demonstrations are expected and we fear there will again be clashes and that violence will be used against demonstrators.

Will Germany take the same stance in the Security Council should there be another vote: will it abstain if it is proposed that influence be exerted from the outside?

Naturally, we don't discuss in public how we are going to act in certain situations until that situation arises. We are just as worried and very concerned about the escalation in Yemen. Likewise, we condemn the violence used against demonstrators in Syria. At the same time, we don't believe that the international community and Europe threatening every Arab ruler with military intervention is the solution. Let me point out that this isn't always simply a conflict between democrats and autocratic systems. Rather, it's often about tribal conflicts and that also has to be taken into account. Or take the situation in Bahrain: it's a conflict between Shiites and Sunnis. That's to say, there's also a religious background in that country. All things considered, I believe it's important to stand shoulder to shoulder with democrats if they really want a democratic transition. However, it's also evident that we cannot threaten to launch a military operation in every country in North Africa or in Yemen where wrongs are committed or intolerable levels of violence are used, never mind actually carry one out.

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