Gentiloni: We are very active in Syrian talks. Mosul, strategic intervention (Corriere della Sera)

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“The crises in Syria and Libya have brought out the need for a concerted effort in the Mediterranean; major powers, European powers and influential regional powers working together on solutions. But this is something that we are going to have to force ourselves to make stable with the minimum means needed to make that possible: measures to strengthen mutual trust, trade, collaboration on fighting terrorism. We all feel the need to build a new order, now that the old one has broken down. The experience of these discussions must be viewed beyond the difficulty of resolving the crisis of the moment to how they delineate a new architecture for security in a Mediterranean currently prey to total chaos”.

It has been an important week for Paolo Gentiloni and his foreign ministry, with Rome the crossroads for all the world’s diplomacy. First the RomaMed Conference and then the summit on Libya, both a success for Italy, which returns to playing a prominent role after having been cut out on dossiers such as Iran and Ukraine. If the mechanism tending to gain momentum in Europe was to see the diplomacy avant-garde in Germany, France and the UK, another one has been created that includes our country as a permanent fixture.

Yesterday Obama thanked various countries, among them Italy, for their commitment to the anti-Daesh coalition. Is the Premier’s announcement that Italy will be sending another 450 soldiers to protect the Mosul dam in Iraq part of that?

«The intervention is of strategic importance consisting of the defence of maintenance operations by Italian and Kurdish Peshmerga forces in an area of Iraqi Kurdistan that is very close to the area controlled by Daesh».

Obama also said that it was necessary to strike the jihadists in Syria harder. Does Italy continue to maintain it will not have a direct involvement in combat?

«Italy is very active in the diplomatic process regarding Syria, which has come to a fundamental point, not least in light of the talks between Kerry and Putin. Last week in Riyadh, a cartel of groups that oppose Assad was formed. There are grounds for beginning talks between the regime and the opposition forces in January, which would have to coincide with a ceasefire. At that moment, a 6-month period during to launch the transition would

begin. In our view Assad should have to leave during that process, but there has been no declared outcome at the negotiating table as yet ».

Why is it different this time for Libya?

«The important thing about Sunday's summit, of which Italian diplomacy must be proud, is that we were able to build the maximum international consensus possible around the courage and willingness of the majority of the members of the two Libyan parties; the fact remains that the next moves are in their hands».

One of your predecessors, Emma Bonino, warned of the risk of excessive haste in forcing an accord.

«The risks are clear, but the timeframe is not infinite. The two majorities are determined to go forward, and the international community is supporting them in an effort to outpace deterioration in the situation and the spread of the Daesh threat, which would push everything out of control. Those who say that it is now necessary to allow the greatest consensus possible to solidify are right, it has to be extended to tribes, militias and municipalities. This is what Italy has been doing for months».

Where do you see problems?

«By definition, in a much too fragmented nation. It is not going to be easy to put together a critical mass capable of reigning it back in under a single leadership. There are going to myriad obstacles, and the first will probably be the transfer of the new government to Tripoli, which calls for the proper security assurances. But the obstacle course is also offset by three powerful factors: the support of the international community confirmed here in Rome, the possibility that this will rapidly be translated into a Security Council resolution, and the widespread willingness of the most diverse Libyan components, starting with the tribes, to re-appropriate a nation of massive resources and potential».

Once a political solution has been formulated, with the establishment of a national unity executive and UN recognition, could the new government request security assurances, and how would we provide them? What role would Italy play?

«We will have a role of undeniable importance, along with the international community, but the real protagonists must be the Libyans themselves. History is full of examples of revolutions in which militias that once fought each other were later integrated into a system of national security. Where that did not happen there were enormous problems. This will, I hope, be one of the major challenges of the coming year».

But the challenge of security is an external one also, i.e. the presence of Isis-Daesh. Will we also be contributing to the fight against the jihadists?

«We will do so to the extent that the international community and Libya ask us to. We will be in the forefront, not least for reasons of history, geography and current concerns such as migration and the terrorist threat. But if the process does not manage to go forward as quickly and compactly as necessary, we are not defenceless: we are equally capable of confronting those threats».

Source : https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interviste/2015/12/gentiloni-intervento-strategico/