Transcript of Bassma Kodmani interview

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INTERVIEW:

DR BASSMA KODMANI

SPOKESWOMAN SYRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL

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ANDREW MARR:

In Syria, the army has launched a new assault yesterday shelling some of the centres of the uprising against the Assad regime. The military operation has raised fears of a new all out offensive. Earlier I was joined from Istanbul by a senior member of the Syrian National Council, which is the group which many countries now recognise as the official opposition. Dr Bassma Kodmani is Head of the Foreign Relations Council. I began by asking her if she believed that Kofi Annan's talks with Bashar al-Assad, which are now in their second day, would bring any relief to the situation.

BASSMA KODMANI:

Relief, first of all, definitely. The emergency there is such that I think one first result of Kofi Annan's visit should be the free access for humanitarian assistance, immediate humanitarian assistance. If that does not happen, I am not sure Kofi Annan will be able to continue his mission. So this is, I think, a first concrete result that anyone would like to see - that the SNC would like to see, and the people in Syria definitely. In terms of the prospects for his success, we just want to make sure this is not just a mere mediation. For us, from the SNC perspective, there is no way there's any discussion or dialogue. We don't speak of dialogue. We actually speak of negotiations based on a clear plan. And that plan from our perspective - and I think from the Syrians' perspective - thousands have died, for Bashar al-Assad to go. So him stepping down is definitely a first condition of any discussion, any negotiation.

ANDREW MARR:
Sorry, if he said - as he appears to have said, Assad - that a ceasefire or some end of violence on either side would allow proper talks, that's not enough for you? You need to hear more from him than that?

BASSMA KODMANI:

A ceasefire from his perspective puts both sides on the same level. What the regime security troops are doing and the army are doing and the atrocities they are committing are not comparable to people on the ground protecting civilians and defending themselves. The people have been fighting a regime and they want the end of this regime. If this is going to be turned into a conflict between two parties, this is not going to go in the right direction.

ANDREW MARR:

Yes.

BASSMA KODMANI:

So I think from all perspectives, this needs to be very clear, and for Kofi Annan in particular.

ANDREW MARR:

Now you're in Istanbul. Quite a lot of the high ranking defectors from the Assad regime have arrived in Turkey, and indeed the story is that Kofi Annan is coming to Turkey as well after Syria. Turkey seems to be becoming a very important player in this. As long as Russia and other countries refuse to have a kind of united world view on Syria, Turkey's role seems to be becoming more important.

BASSMA KODMANI:

For us, Turkey is going to be a key player in any scenario in the future whether it is a negotiation and whether it is some form of intervention to create some safe zones, to ensure access for humanitarian aid into the country. Turkey is everybody's best partner here. It is a border country. It has its own concerns. Its own security is affected by what happens in Syria at the moment ...

ANDREW MARR:

Of course.
BASSMA KODMANI:

... and, therefore, it will need to be part of any arrangement in the coming, I hope, weeks.

ANDREW MARR:

As a leading member of the Syrian opposition, what do you say to those people who say the trouble is with Assad gone Syria would break out into civil war?

BASSMA KODMANI:

The first thing to know is that this dictatorship is working every single day (and we have examples of that) to incite hatred between communities, and I think this provides the answer. When you say this regime is really seeking to create those ethnic and religious differences among people and hatred and incite to vengeance, then I think the quicker this regime goes, the better. Syrians have many, many stories to tell of how Alawites were bringing in food and smuggling food into Homs when Baba Amr was under siege. We know that Christians hide some of the civilians and some of the Free Army elements. We know that people are keeping together and bonding together on the ground in face of this incredibly horrible regime. And I think that indicates that the ground exists clearly and solidly for all communities to come together. It's a political arrangement that we need. It is not a religious reconciliation operation. People have lived together and the regime has sought to isolate communities one from the other, to isolate every citizen from any other citizen actually because any joint work is a threat to the regime, and, therefore, people just need to bond together and they have bonded together in face of the regime, in face of the atrocities. I think this lays the ground for a political arrangement to emerge from the aftermath of the regime.

ANDREW MARR:

Bassma Kodmani, a very emotional time. Thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

INTERVIEW ENDS