ANDREW MARR:
As the violence in Syria just gets worse and worse, the efforts are intensifying to find some meaningful international response: Arab foreign ministers are going to be meeting in Cairo to discuss the crisis later today, and there’ll be a further debate at the United Nations this week. But Turkey is Syria’s neighbour, a growing regional power, and is now stepping forward to take a leading role. I’m joined now by the Ambassador of Turkey in London, Unal Cevikoz. Welcome Ambassador.

UNAL CEVIKOS:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Now your Prime Minister has made it clear that he thinks this is Turkey’s moment to step forward and try to bring the parties in Syria together in some way. Can you explain how, you know given the terrible violence and mutual hatred that's scarring that country now, how that might be possible?
Well let me first explain how we arrived at this point. We have been trying to reach out to the Syrian leadership since March last year and we have tried to explain that the demonstrations which have started in Syria indicate that there is a need for change. And that was the reason why my Prime Minister, President and also the Foreign Minister, they all tried to explain that it was necessary to insert some kind of political reform in the system. President Assad in all these contacts promised that he would be delivering, but unfortunately he did not hold his promises. Then we realised that bilateral contacts did not bring any solution to the problem and then we raised our attempts and we tried to mobilise the regional initiatives. We tried to reach out to the regional organisations, and we coordinated with the Arab League and that was the result. As you know, Arab League has taken a very interesting initiative, and at the end of this initiative there have been some observers in the country but again …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But basically ignored, ignored by the regime.

UNAL CEVIKOS:
They were all ignored and President Assad has been unable to come to terms with the expectations of his people and of the international community.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Yes. You were Ambassador in Moscow I think for a while as well?

UNAL CEVIKOS:
No, I was in Iraq …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) In Iraq, I beg your pardon. I was going to ask whether there is sort of surprise in Turkey about the hard line being taken by Russia and China, which is stopping kind of the international community moving as one?

UNAL CEVIKOS:
It is of course very sad and it is very disappointing that we have not been able to reach
a solution in the United Nations Security Council, but the two countries, the two permanent members - Russia and China - have chosen to vote like that.

ANDREW MARR:
How worried is Turkey about a complete break-up in Syria - either civil war or the sudden collapse of regime - because there are lots of warring groups and of course lots of vulnerable groups in that country as well?

UNAL CEVIKOS:
We have been trying to reach out to all the segments of the society. Syria is a mosaic society: there are different sects, there are different religions - there are Christians, Muslims; and there are also different ethnicities …

ANDREW MARR:
Yes.

UNAL CEVIKOS:
… Arabs and Kurds, so it is a very mosaic structure. And that is the reason why we are concerned that if violence continues it may bring the country into a kind of a civil war, and that is of course very alarming. That is the reason why we have been recommending to all the opposition forces to get together, not to make any kind of division or discrimination, and to bring all kinds of segments of the society under the same kind of an opposition movement.

ANDREW MARR:
So you would like to bring representatives of the regime and the opposition together to agree parliamentary elections next year? Is that the idea?

UNAL CEVIKOS:
That is of course one of the elements which is envisaged in the Arab League initiative, and I believe Arab League and the United Nations are very strongly working on that because transition of power and free and democratic elections are absolutely necessary for the future of Syria.
ANDREW MARR:  
Military intervention is completely off the table?

UNAL CEVIKOS:  
It is off the table. It is not on the agenda neither of Turkey, nor of any other country.

ANDREW MARR:  
What about arming the rebel groups?

UNAL CEVIKOS:  
This is also off the agenda because this would be a very dangerous step forward and it will simply escalate the violence. That is something which has to be avoided and I don’t think that anybody is considering this as an alternative at this moment.

ANDREW MARR:  
So in the end somebody is going to have to look President Assad in the eye and persuade him that he is going to have to either deal seriously with the opposition groups or go. Who is going to do that?

UNAL CEVIKOS:  
I think he is going to do that and he has to respond to the expectations and the demands of his people because what is happening in Syria is a very serious development. The people is not happy with the establishment, with the regime and with the President, and this is why all these events are happening.

ANDREW MARR:  
And could at the very worst spark a wider war if you know things go really badly?

UNAL CEVIKOS:  
That has to be under control, of course, but we simply do not want this escalate further. Violence has to stop. I think the Syrian administration has to remove all the military machinery from the cities, and once the violence stops I think there will be a possibility for the opposition to establish dialogue with the regime and this will certainly give the opportunity to the Syrian people to establish a free democratic
society.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Ambassador, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

**UNAL CEVIKOS:**
Thank you.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**