Russian mediation in Syria, a possible honourable way out of the conflict.

Diario Perfil
Irma Argüello

10 September 2013 | Link to the original article

Yesterday, and as an immediate reaction to a statement made by State Secretary John Kerry in regards to the US desisting from the proclaimed military action if Syria relinquished its chemical arsenal, Russia, Al-Assad’s regime main ally, through its Minister of Foreign Relations, Sergei Lavrov, declared that he will work with the Syrian government in that matter. The Russian proposal includes not only to yield its present arsenal to international control, but also to accomplish its future utter destruction. Declarations from high Syrian officers such as the Minister of Foreign Relations Al-Moallen indicate that the proposal has had a positive repercussion within the al-Assad government.

Syria, which has recently recognized possession of chemical arsenals, is one of the 5 countries which hasn’t yet signed the Chemical Weapons Convention which places such weapons outside international law. The US government accused al-Assad’s regime of having perpetrated a chemical attack on the past August 21st outside Damascus against its own population, although evidences were never shown to public opinion.

The rapid Russian reactions clearly opens an opportunity window, not only to avoid an attack on Syria with hard to estimate consequences, but also to allow an honorable exit to the different actors in the conflict, mainly countries in favor of the use of force outside the international law.
As it is known, an intervention as the one suggested by the United States, even under humanitarian arguments, must base its legality on the United Nations Security Council mandate. Consequently, all unilateral action outside this mandate is illegal. Likewise, the multiple arguments stated if not to achieve legality, legitimacy and support in the international community had a poor outcome.

In this sense, the development of events showed that few governments accompanied the initiative and none of them achieved the intern approval to participate directly in military actions. Public opinion did not accompanied the enthusiasm for direct action in any of the countries that promoted the intervention either, neither in the United States, France nor the United Kingdom, the polls showed that a big part of the citizenship opposes such procedure.

Particularly, analyzing the situation in the United States, the Congress should have been in conditions to take a decision on Tuesday September 11, but such debate, in light of recent events, has been suspended indefinitely. President Obama submitted to the Congress the authorization of an unilateral attack, but the support has been reduced. In both chambers, polarization between yes and no is important reaching both democrats and republicans, however, according to the last available data, the chances to reach a favorable vote for the attack are almost zero. In sight of the stated situation, the arising opportunity should not be wasted.

The removal of chemical weapons in power of the government, under a realist plan, will bring some relief to the region, but is far from enough: it is necessary to face a sustained effort to retrieve chemical agents in hands of the rebels. The political steps necessary for the negotiation of long lasting solutions that settle the civil war that already has taken over 100000 lives must go under United Nations supervision.

In this manner, it is important to remark the essential role of the United States and Russia, which must work together to sustain any solution. It is also essential to accomplish that interested third countries abstain from continuing to provide resources and financing the parties in conflict to nurture the hostilities. On the contrary, all outside aid must exclusively be destined to humanitarian ends, given the extreme severity of the situation, not only in Syria, but also in the neighboring countries that have already received a million and a half displaced people.
Finally, the joint work of the international community has to neutralize firmly the pretension of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda or Hezbollah, which are fighting on one side or the other seeking to strengthen their structures at the expense of reigning chaos in order to achieve their further global expansion.

The stated opportunity is clearly in the benefit of the conflict’s main involved actors. If so, **Obama would be in conditions to avoid a very probable backflip in Congress** that would leave him weak in the inner front. Meanwhile he could capitalize his firm condemnatory position regarding chemical weapons and its use in the conflict; Russia, after vetoing several Security Council resolutions against al-Assad’s regime, has shown its willingness to seek solutions, strongly questioned in the past. On the other hand, the Syrian regime can avoid an attack clearly destined to erode its power, which will be preserved for a while. If some other protagonists cannot find major benefits in the situation, it is clear that the yielding of all chemical weapons to international control and its eradication from the conflict will simultaneously bring a considerable tension decrease in the zone, and a following improvement of the civilian population conditions, all that shall progressively consolidate once the path of political thorough negotiation has been consolidated to bring a definite solution to Syria.