

China And Russia Slam West Over Syria

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Qiu Yongzheng in Damascus and Wang Zhaokun in Beijing

China and Russia yesterday rejected US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's criticism of their stand on Syria, as the European Union (EU) nations agreed to slap new sanctions on the Syrian government.

China "cannot accept it at all," foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei told reporters at a regular daily news briefing.

At a conference on Syria last week in Tunisia, Clinton called the Chinese and Russian veto of a UN resolution on Syria "despicable."

"We suggest the Syrian people's own choice should be respected and outsiders should not impose any so-called Syrian solution on Syria or the Syrian people," Hong said.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin yesterday also accused the West of being "cynical" over the stance on Syria.

Putin said the West "lacks the patience to work out an adjusted and balanced" resolution that also requires opposition forces to cease fire and withdraw from flashpoints, such as the besieged central city of Homs.

China and Russia on Friday did not attend the "Friends of Syria" meeting, in which more than 60 foreign ministers gathered to seek an end to the 11 months of turmoil in the country.

Hong reiterated China did not attend the conference last week as the aim, effect and mechanism of the conference had not been further studied.

In Syria, the interior minister announced yesterday almost 90 percent of Syrians approved a new constitution, proposed by President Bashar al-Assad, in a referendum on Sunday. Turnout in the referendum was 57.4 percent, state television said.

However, despite the step, which Assad has said is a move toward reform that could bring political pluralism to Syria, the EU agreed to a further round of economic sanctions yesterday, targeting the Syrian central bank and some ministers, curbing gold trading and banning cargo flights.

The vote is likely to further complicate the situation in Syria, according to Yin Gang, a senior

Middle East expert at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

“The legitimacy of the Assad government is set to be strengthened once the draft constitution is approved, but the move will not change the attitude of the forces at home and abroad that has been demanding Assad’s immediate stepping down,” he said.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani said yesterday Arab countries should take part in an international military effort to stop the bloodshed in Syria, urging nations to provide arms to Syria’s opposition.

“If the Assad government could follow up on the reforms it promised in the constitutional referendum, this would help ease the pressure he is facing at home. It might even lead to further division among the opposition groups in Syria,” Li Weijian, director of the Research Center of West Asian and African Studies at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, told the Global Times.

“Since the signal sent by the conference on Syria in Tunisia is that the West will not choose military intervention at the moment. They may choose to secretly arm the Syrian oppositions to pile up pressure on Assad,” Li added.

Agencies contributed to this story.

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