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## Iran warns NATO against entering Syria "quagmire"

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Iran warned NATO on Sunday against any temptation to intervene in Syria, saying that rather than the defeating a regime it would be bogged down in a "quagmire" similar to Iraq or Afghanistan.

Syria's closest ally in the Middle East, Iran has in recent days tempered its strong support for President Bashar al-Assad with calls for him to respect the "legitimate demands" of his people.

But with the fall of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, aided by NATO bombings, Tehran is concerned at the possible, if unlikely, prospect of something similar happening in Syria.

"Syria is the front-runner in Middle Eastern resistance (to Israel) and NATO cannot intimidate this country with an attack," Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi told the official IRNA news agency.

"If, God forbid, such a thing happened, NATO would drown in a quagmire from which it would never be able to escape..."

"If the West should want to follow the same course as they have done in Iraq and Afghanistan they would not realize the desired result."

The United Nations says 2,200 people have been killed since Assad sent in tanks and troops to crush demonstrations that erupted in March after the presidents of Tunisia and Egypt were toppled by popular protests.

While most neighboring countries have criticized the crackdown, Tehran has explicitly backed Assad, although Salehi said on Saturday that "governments must be responsive to the legitimate demands of (their) people ... be it Syria, Yemen or other countries."