

## Syria fears Libya's fate

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Global Research, August 27, 2011

[Voice of Russia](#) 27 August 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Damascus fears that NATO may redeploy its forces to Syria after the termination of its military campaign in Libya. If this happens, Syria's prospects for democratic development will be killed stone dead, according to both left-wing and liberal groups of that country's moderate opposition.

Member of the Syrian Communist Party's political bureau Najmeddin Khreit is sure the time is ripe for reforms in his country. Even though its economic situation is better than in other riot-stricken Arab countries, the life of ordinary people is becoming increasingly difficult. Yes, unemployment rates are not as high as in Egypt or Tunisia but they keep growing, especially among the youth, and have eroded the society alongside a simultaneous increase in corruption. Our frozen political system, Najmeddin Khreit says, prevented us from having a free discussion of all the problems and ways to solve them.

The last few months witnessed a launch of democratic changes but even leaders of the ruling Baath Party recognize that it was already late for reforms. The situation only escalated when the regime's radical opponents appealed to arms, Najmeddin Khreit explains.

"For the sake of our homeland and its interests, all Syrians have to join efforts and help the country out of the crisis. The most urgent objective is to stop violence on both sides because it can only generate more violence in response. Of course, armed anti-government groups should cease their raids. The authorities need to promptly start a broad dialogue with the opposition and also cope with the issue of partially released political prisoners. These measures will create conditions for doing away with the crisis if taken without delay, in view of the world's alarming situation," Najmeddin Khreit said.

Nearly the same ideas were outlined by authoritative Syrian human rights activist Salim Kheirbek in his recent letter to President Bashar al-Assad. Kheirbek, who spent 13 years in prison for his beliefs, possesses quite a variety of awards for his activity. He said presidential administration officials were favorably disposed when receiving his letter and even met with him several times. Salim Kheirbek is sure reforms should not be delayed and shared his view with our correspondent. Being a graduate of the Moscow-based Peoples' Friendship University, he has a good command of Russian.

"With Gaddafi's rule about to end, NATO will most likely send its forces to Syria. Our president believes they are preparing for an attack against us, which will hardly facilitate democratic changes. I have no idea of what will happen to Syria in such a case," Salim Kheirbek says.

Damascus is anxiously following the developments in Libya. Neither Syrian leaders nor constructive opposition want a repetition of the Libyan scenario which will cost a lot to ordinary citizens, like any of the NATO-masterminded campaigns.

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