Ryabkov: It's the West's Fault

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Russia said Friday that the West is stoking the conflict in Syria by sending weapons to opponents of President Bashar Assad.

In an attempt to deflect criticism of Russia for blocking a UN Security Council resolution urging Assad to give up power, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Western states were stirring up trouble in Syria, where Assad has pursued a violent crackdown since March on protests against his 11-year rule.

"Western states inciting Syrian opposition to uncompromising actions, as well as those sending arms to them, giving them advice and direction, are participating in the process of fomenting the crisis," Itar-Tass quoted Ryabkov as saying.

He did not specify which nations were arming Syrian rebels.

On Feb. 5, Russia and China vetoed a Western-Arab draft UN resolution that called on Assad to quit. That drew U.S. and European criticism, which Russia dismissed as hysterical.

Ryabkov, speaking on a visit to Colombia, said Russia would take "drastic measures" if

the West kept trying to intervene in Syria's internal affairs through the Security Council.

"The UN council is not a tool for intervention in internal affairs and is not the agency to decide which government is to be next in one country or another," Ryabkov said.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who is almost certain to win the presidential election in March, warned the West not to meddle in the affairs of Syria or those of Russia.

The State Duma adopted a statement Friday condemning the West for "intervening in other states' affairs and imposing outside decisions on them."

Some lawmakers in the assembly, which is controlled by Putin's ruling party, called for firmer resistance to the West.

"There is criticism in the Duma that Russia's position on Syria is not strong enough. They say Russia should press its point harder," said Alexei Pushkov, chairman of the State Duma Committee on Foreign Affairs.

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