

Chess Head Fears Syria Will Be 3rd World War

By [Howard Amos](#)

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Ilyumzhinov

One of the last men to speak to Moammar Gadhafi before his death, president of the World Chess Federation Kirsan Ilyumzhinov warned Monday that a third world war could unfold in Syria.

Ilyumzhinov played a game of chess with the former Libyan leader last June as NATO bombs rained down on the civil war-ravaged country.

"What I saw in Libya is now repeating itself in Syria," the former president of the Kalmykia republic told The Moscow Times. More than 5,000 people are estimated to have been killed in an 11-month uprising against the regime in Damascus.

If NATO began military action in Syria, "it would be the start of a third world war," Ilyumzhinov said on the sidelines of an announcement about the upcoming World Chess

Championship. "Next would be Iran and other countries with oil and gas — Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan."

Russia and China vetoed a motion on Syria at the United Nations Security Council on Feb. 3 that called for the resignation of President Bashar Assad, democratic reforms and a cessation of violence.

"The position of the Russian Federation was absolutely correct," Ilyumzhinov said. "Assad has already gone the way of dialogue. ... That's everything he must do, the other way is the spilling of blood and killing of people."

Head of the World Chess Federation — or FIDE — for 16 years, Ilyumzhinov is known for the alien abduction he said he experienced in 1997. Human-like creatures in yellow spacesuits visited him in his Moscow apartment and took him for a ride in their spaceship, he said last year.

The flamboyant politician also has close ties to Middle Eastern dictators. As well as Libya, Ilyumzhinov visited Iraq on the eve of the U.S.-led invasion and met with Saddam Hussein's son. Gadhafi reportedly phoned Ilyumzhinov as rebels overran Tripoli less than two months before his death.

NATO is mounting a personal attack on Assad just as it did on Gadhafi, the Buddhist and chess fanatic said. "At the very beginning, there was a decision taken to kill one person — just like now."

The next FIDE World Chess Championship will take place in Moscow in May, as Soviet-educated Israeli citizen Boris Gelfand challenges world champion Viswanathan Anand.

President Dmitry Medvedev's economic aide Arkady Dvorkovich is the chairman of the Russian Chess Federation's supervisory board and backed Ilyumzhinov in a bitter battle against former grandmaster Anatoly Karpov to win the FIDE presidency in 2010.

Dvorkovich signed an agreement Monday with the Tretyakov Gallery to host the matches, during which Gelfand and Anand will vie for \$2.55 million in prize money.

Sitting alongside Ilyumzhinov and beneath Mikhail Vrubel's gigantic "Princess of Dreams" panel, Dvorkovich said the choice of venue gives chess audiences the opportunity to see "not only chess but also Russian culture."

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