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## **Assassination of a Quisling**

On May 9<sup>th</sup>, just as the local officials were commemorating Victory Day in Grozny, the former capital of the break-away Chechen Republic, a bomb was detonated under the VIP tribune killing the Moscow installed president Akhmad Kadyrov and an unspecified number of other guests. It seems that just as Kadyrov's boss, President Putin, was attempting to paint a picture of stability in the region and as it appeared that Kadyrov and his son were establishing an even tighter and brutal hold on its inhabitants, the illusion has been blown away and Chechnya once again will become a front-line problem for the Kremlin, one that destabilising Moscow's hopes of ever greater centralisation. TSM looks at the man and the potential ramifications of the assassination.

### **The life of a Turncoat**

Surprisingly enough, given his recent position as Moscow's puppet, Kadyrov was not long ago a respected religious leader to the Chechens. He was born in Karaganda to a poor Chechen family which had been shipped out of the Caucasus to Kazakhstan, along with all the other Chechens who Stalin saw as a threat to the integrity of the Soviet Union. After studying engineering and agriculture, he turned to religion during the perestroika period of the 1980s, attending schools in Jordan, Oman and Tashkent, finally establishing a religious base for himself in his ancestral homeland.

The rebel leader Dzhokar Dudayev who led first war against Yeltsin recognised and quickly took to Kadyrov, eventually appointing him Grand Mufti of the Republic. Kadyrov in turn, thanked his new patron by declaring a holy war against Moscow, and by leading rebel units against the federal forces. After having inflicted serious damage upon the Russians, Kadyrov participated in the negotiations that led to the embarrassing retreat of Moscow's forces in 1996.

After that time, as the republic established itself as a de facto independent quasi-state, the influence of Wahhabism and Wahhabi actors grew. Some see this as explaining Kadyrov's decision to break with the rebels and become Moscow's man. But his reign as Putin's man would be a short one

### **Botched Security, or an Inside Job?**

Just seven months after his "official" installation, President Kadyrov was killed at the age of 52 during the ceremony held in the Dynamo stadium. Information is still spotty as to the details of the attack, however it seems that the device used was a converted landmine placed under the VIP stand. According to a spokesman from the Ministry for Emergency Affairs another un-detonated mine was found in another part of the stadium after the attack. After the attack there was no immediate claim made by any



recognised separatist group. Nevertheless, Taus Dzhabrailov, Chechen Minister for Information immediately made a statement blaming Aslan Maskhadov, Kadyrov's popular predecessor and Shamil Basayev for the killing. Moscow radio also mentioned that arrests were made soon after the attack. No identities were given

Exactly how the perpetrators could execute such a devastating attack given the state of security around the president following previous attempts on his life has led to much speculation. In fact Nikolai Patrushev, former Federal Security Service (FSB) head has gone on record to say that given the level of protection afforded Kadyrov, the assassination must be the work of traitors close to the president, or at least someone inside the inner circle must have facilitated the placing of the two bombs.

### **Ramifications**

Whilst Chechen Prime Minister Sergei Abramov was also immediately announced by Moscow as taking the position of acting president, it is important to note that the very next day after the attack Ramzan Kadyrov, the President's son was seen on state Television standing next to Vladimir Putin as he made an announcement following the attack. Ramzan, who is infamous for running a private security force numbered several thousand men which is known for the brutality of the tactics it employs is clearing not deterred by his father's death. His ambitions of this 27 year old are being temporarily stymied, however, by the fact that the Chechen constitution stipulates that only those 30 and above may run for the office of president. Predictably members of Moscow installed administration and legislature have already called for a change to constitution. In the meantime elections are slated for September 5<sup>th</sup>. As a temporary sop to the pretender, acting president Abramov has already made Ramzan first deputy Prime Minister in meantime. It is worth noting that the crimes that Ramzan has been accused of by international monitoring bodies, and not just victimised Chechens and the relatives of those that have disappeared, far outstrip, for example, those acts that have occurred in Coalition prisons in Iraq and which have inflamed such scandal of late.

### **A Wake-Up Call for the Kremlin**

It is clear that the assassination seems to have disproved one of Kadyrov's famous statements that "freedom is something the ordinary man does not need." Perhaps the Kremlin now knows this to be false. The fact that nearly every Chechen president, officially recognised by the Kremlin, or otherwise, has been killed to date, or is on the run should indicate that perhaps something radical has to be done in the republic if the killing is to stop. As one Western commentator put it, the assassination has great ramifications, since it has struck Putin "in his Achilles' heel", since it should be remembered that he rose to his current position on a ticket of eradicating Chechen resistance and bringing greater security to the whole Russian Federation. That myth has been forcibly dissolved yet more. Or more bluntly, as the Saudi Arab News service put it just one day after the attack, the assassination: "blows a gaping hole in Russia's Chechnya policy. At a stroke not only is Moscow without its puppet, Chechnya is patently not a war won, an issue resolved, although that was the



impression Putin had managed to give the rest of the world.... The all-important pretence that Chechnya is both self-administered and loyal to Moscow is in tatters.” If the Kremlin persists in attempting to maintain the façade, or decides to extract revenge, then we predict further instability in the region that has fought for centuries for independence from Moscow.