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One month on in the Ukraine war: what role for the kadyrovtsy?

Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine caught many experts flat-footed. Still more surprising was the central role played by the "kadyrovtsy", the personal army of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov. However, this group, and other loosely integrated Chechen units, have previously conducted special operations on behalf of the federal authorities in Moscow. The kadyrovtsy, and similar groups, engaged in Georgia in 2008, Ukraine in 2014, and Syria in 2015. The most elite of Kadyrov's forces have also participated in Russian military exercises in the Arctic and trained alongside Gulf state counterinsurgency forces¹.

The definition of who counts as a "kadyrovets" has expanded since the group's formation in the 1990s². Originally, the kadyrovtsy were the loose collection of militia members serving under Chechnya's Grand Mufti Akhmat Kadyrov. When Kadyrov Senior defected to Vladimir Putin's camp in 1999, the kadyrovtsy followed. Chechnya's reintegration into Russia included the formalization of the kadyrovtsy, now under the command of Akhmat's son Ramzan. Each group was adopted by a branch of the security services and, in theory, integrated into the command structure. This was not successful in all cases. While formally the kadyrovtsy now existed inside a federal security hierarchy, they never left Ramzan's personal command.

Ramzan then formalized and consolidated his power. He won the 2007 election. He eliminated those integrated Chechen militias not under his control. And he was made a general in Rosgvardiya³, so as to add another layer of "officialness" to the *façade* of his personal control

¹ Atle Staalesen, "[Chechen forces are back in the Arctic](#)", *The Barents Observer*, March 17, 2021; Neil Hauer, "[Princely Ties: The growing Chechnya-Gulf security relationship](#)", *The Defense Post*, December 27, 2018.

² Tomáš Šmíd, Miroslav Mareš, "['Kadyrovtsy': Russia's Counterinsurgency Strategy and the Wars of Paramilitary Clans](#)", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 38, n° 5, pp. 650-670.

³ "[Putin prisvoil Kadyrovu zvanie general-leitenanta](#)" [Putin promoted Kadyrov to lieutenant-general], Ura.ru, March 28, 2022.

over the kadyrovtsy. During this period, many started using “kadyrovets” to name any Chechen who supported him⁴.

Kadyrov’s security services, some of whom fought in 2014⁵, have returned as part of the now official Russian presence in Ukraine, which includes military and Rosgvardiya contingents from throughout the North Caucasus. This has caused various figures in the Chechen opposition movement to expand the inclusivity of “kadyrovtsy” once again⁶. Their new definition extends to any native of the Caucasus who fights for Russia. This very broad definition conveys their political stance but is not conducive to the analysis of Kadyrov’s actual fighting force, and thus his capability to exercise violence in Chechnya.

For the sake of this essay, we will use the term “kadyrovtsy” to refer to the traditional security groups operating under the Rosgvardiya umbrella organization. These units include those of the National Guard Forces and the specialized riot (OMON) and rapid-response (SOBR) police units.

The pack

As explained above, the kadyrovtsy are not a singular unit. They are composed primarily of different units of the Russian National Guard in Chechnya. Disclosures by open-source and oppositional Chechen investigators have been augmented by the significant number of photographic and video evidence sent back to the Chechen authorities from the staging grounds and frontlines, allowing for a relatively straightforward listing of the units and leaders involved in the invasion of Ukraine. Their fates, however, are less definitive.

The Conflict Intelligence Team published information on the mobilization of the Sever Battalion⁷, and accompanying OMON units, on February 3. The unit was detected – quite easily as it was still in its marked vehicles – when travelling toward Ukraine. Sever had not previously deployed outside of Chechnya. The kadyrovtsy’s mobilization was confirmed by the Chechen opposition movement “1ADAT,” which is a network of anonymous dissidents located in Chechnya and throughout the diaspora. 1ADAT’s sources provided videos of the battalion loading up and deploying⁸.

Two pieces of evidence from the frontlines contribute the most to knowing which units are present. The first is a video posted by Ramzan Kadyrov to his personal Telegram channel on February 26th. In the clip⁹, four soldiers send a message to Ramzan. These men are: Sharip Delimkhanov, Ramzan’s cousin and brother to Duma Representative Adam Delimkhanov, currently a general-major of Chechnya’s Rosgvardiya branch and formerly commander of the Oil Regiment; Magomed Tushaev, the infamous head of the Sever Battalion; Anzor Bisaev, leader of OMON “Akhmat-Grozny”; and Saidi Lorsankaev, the deputy commander of SOBR “Akhmat”. The second piece of key evidence is a photograph depicting various fighters, who then signed a paper with their names and units¹⁰. From this paper, the presence is confirmed for the “Sever” and “Yug” battalions, the Oil Regiment (Neftepolk), and OMON “Akhmat-Grozny”. Sever is also known as the Akhmat Kadyrov Regiment, as it was officially renamed in 2010 to the 141st Special

⁴ “[Novaya Portsiya Evrokadyrovtsyev](#)” [A New Portion of Euro-kadyrovtsy], VAYFOND, May 4, 2019.

⁵ “[Chechens Now Fighting On Both Sides In Ukraine](#)”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 30, 2014.

⁶ Zakir Magomedov, “[‘Moi glavnyi vrag – Putin’ Intervyu s komandirom chechenskogo batal’ona v Ukraine Myclimov Cheberloevskim](#)” [‘My main enemy is Putin’ Interview with the commander of a Chechen battalion in Ukraine Muslim Cheberloevsky], *Kavkaz.Realii*, March 7, 2022.

⁷ [Conflict Intelligence Team](#), Twitter, February 3, 2022.

⁸ [1ADAT](#) and [1ADAT](#), Telegram, February 4, 2022.

⁹ “[Ramzan Kadyrov pokazal video s uchastiem Magomeda Tushaeva i Anzora Bisaeva](#)” [Ramzan Kadyrov posts video with Magomed Tushaev and Anzor Bisaev], *Chechnya Today*, February 27, 2022.

Motorized Regiment of the Russian National Guard named for Akhmat-Khadzhi Kadyrov – which is obviously a mouthful to say. This unit is different from the equally notorious Akhmat Kadyrov Police Regiment. SOBR “Akhmat” did not make an explicit appearance on this list, but several men simply put their unit as “Rosgvardiya”.

Despite the impressive evidence disclosed by these posts, they do not provide all of the information about who is present as part of the kadyrovtsy forces. Other videos depict Daniil Martynov, a former member of the FSB’s “Alfa” group and a close advisor to Kadyrov, and Khusein Mezhidov, the commander of the Yug Battalion¹¹. Alibek Delimkhanov, Sharip’s brother, arrived later¹².

Estimates of the number of kadyrovtsy have varied widely. Further complicating the assessment are Kadyrov’s frequent claims of further deployments, which have increased from 10,000 to 20,000 to 70,000 to hundreds of thousands¹³. Another reason why estimating the kadyrovtsy’s numbers is so difficult is that they have not been clearly operating as distinct units, but rather as a single, combined group. This is evident in the numerous propaganda videos published on Kadyrov’s Telegram channel, which show commanders from multiple units leading a single group’s activities. These numbers have also become hard to establish because of conflicting casualty reports and departures from Ukraine¹⁴ – combined with recent deployments of new units near Mariupol. Allegedly, there are still members of Sever near Kyiv¹⁵, although this information did not come from the Kadyrov regime. Chechnya’s leadership has also pointed to kadyrovtsy being active near Kherson, Kharkiv, Zaporozhe, and Rubezhnoe in Luhansk¹⁶. The kadyrovtsy present in these areas are, however, more likely to be regulars rather than members of Chechen Rosgvardiya units, as their locations are exceptions to the pattern of deployments otherwise publicized by the Chechen authorities.

The kadyrovtsy leaders have been plagued by rumors of their deaths, and later of their departure from Ukraine, which have not been confirmed. At one point or another, all of Chechen leaders were said to have been killed – except for Saidi Lorsankaev, who seems to be forgotten by both the opposition and the regime. Claims of Magomed Tushaev’s death persist but are false. Khusein Mezhidov returned to Chechnya to launch a recruitment campaign, while Tushaev and Martynov are claimed to have relocated near Mariupol¹⁷.

As the push to Kyiv stalled out around March 13, the focus turned instead to Mariupol, home base for the Azov Battalion, with whom the kadyrovtsy have long feuded. Here, under the direction of Duma representative Adam Delimkhanov, the kadyrovtsy were tasked with cleaning out the Ukrainian forces¹⁸, particularly Azov members, from the city. One specific objective was

¹⁰ [Ichkeria Info](#) and [Ichkeria Info](#), Telegram, March 1, 2022.

¹¹ [RIA Novosti](#), Telegram, February 26, 2022; [Kanal spetsial’nogo naznacheniya](#), Telegram, February 27, 2022.

¹² [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 10, 2022.

¹³ [1ADAT](#), Telegram, February 25, 2022; [SKFO Telegraph](#), Telegram, February 25, 2022; [RIA Novosti](#), Telegram, February 25, 2022; [Grozny TV](#), Telegram, March 14, 2022.

¹⁴ [Harold Chambers](#), Twitter, February 24, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 1, 2022; Chechnya Insaid, “[Pervaya partii rossiiskikh voennykh vernulas’ iz Ukrainy na bazy dislokatsii v Chechne](#)” [The first party of Russian soldiers returned from Ukraine to deployment bases in Chechnya], [Kavkazskii Uzel](#), March 13, 2022; [ChP Chechnya](#), Telegram, March 22, 2022.

¹⁵ [SKFO Telegraph](#), Telegram, March 24, 2022.

¹⁶ [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 18, 2022; [Umar Daudov](#), Telegram, March 2, 2022; [ChP Chechnya](#), Telegram, March 19, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 19, 2022.

¹⁷ [Harold Chambers](#), Twitter, March 18, 2022; [Security Turkey](#), Telegram, March 18, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 22, 2022.

¹⁸ [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 14, 2022.

to take the Azovstal metallurgy plant, in which Azov fighters were supposedly hiding. The deployment of new kadyrovtsy alongside Adam Delimkhanov corresponded with a steep drop-off in the presence of the kadyrovtsy's earlier leaders (*i.e.*, Mezhidov, Bisaev, Tushaev, Martynov) in propaganda videos from the front. On March 23, a meeting was supposedly held near Kyiv between Mezhidov, Bisaev, Tushaev, and Alibek and Sharip Delimkhanov¹⁹. However, it is not possible to geolocate the video. Mezhidov had been in Chechnya since at least March 18, and the Eastern Military District had taken over command of that area²⁰, all of which casts doubt on this video.

Other than Adam Delimkhanov, the new deployments to the Mariupol front include B-list advisors who were not even included in Kadyrov's propagandistic calls for deployment²¹. The only noteworthy addition is Ruslan Geremeev²², who is connected to the 2015 murder of Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov.

This changing of the guard has created an opening for many doubts to be sowed about the kadyrovtsy. In addition to the expected pervasive rumors about units and leaders leaving the combat zone, the Chechen opposition has seized the opportunity to spread an alternative perspective of the new kadyrovtsy deployments. Popular opposition figures claim that the new recruits are not the elite units depicted in propaganda clips, but rather a combination of children, people with disabilities, and drug addicts²³. There is no easy way to verify these assertions.

Rabid and lethal

Before the invasion, the kadyrovtsy's reputation was one of brutality toward civilian populations and ruthless efficiency in counterterrorism operations (CTOs). This reputation informed, in part, the expected objectives for the group in Ukraine.

The kadyrovtsy's violent treatment of civilians has been well reported. Their campaign to purge Chechnya of its LGBT residents resulted in abundant torture and extrajudicial executions²⁴, with victims in the latter cases being retroactively labeled terrorists by the authorities²⁵. The opposition movement "1ADAT" tracks kidnappings by the authorities, which take place frequently. This aspect of the force's reputation played a central role in the Russian "psy op" during the buildup and initial days of the invasion.

This indiscriminate violence was all claimed to be in the name of creating stability during CTOs. The data clearly shows the rapid decline of militant activity in Chechnya from 2012 to 2019²⁶. However, the timing of the most significant drop in militant activity coincides with an exodus of

¹⁹ [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 23, 2022; [Akhmed Dudaev](#), Telegram, March 15, 2022.

²⁰ [Voennyi Osvedomitel](#), Telegram, March 24, 2022.

²¹ [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 16, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 17, 2022.

²² [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 26, 2022.

²³ [Khasan Khalitov](#), Telegram, March 12, 2022; 1ADAT, "[Kadyrovtsy nachali ispolzovat' zekov v Ukraine](#)" [Kadyrovtsy began to use conscripts in Ukraine], March 12, 2022; 1ADAT, "[Kadyrovtsy otpravlyayut v Ukrainu dazhe invalidov](#)" [Kadyrovtsy send even invalids to Ukraine], March 18, 2022; 1ADAT, "[Kadyrovskie namestniki okkupantov otpravlyayut v Ukrainu narkomanov](#)" [Kadyrovite governors of the occupants send drug addicts to Ukraine], March 19, 2022.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, "[Russia: New Anti-Gay Crackdown in Chechnya](#)", May 8, 2019; Elena Milashina, "[Kazn' posle smerti](#)" [Execution after death], *Novaya Gazeta*, February 15, 2021.

²⁵ 1ADAT, "[Statistika](#)" [Statistics].

²⁶ Kavkazskii Uzel, "[Statistika zhertv na Severnom Kavkaze po kategoriyam za 8 let](#)" [Statistics of victims in the North Caucasus by category for 8 years].

fighters to Syria. Regardless of whether the kadyrovtsy were actually responsible for the decline of the Islamic insurgency in Chechnya, the latter's defeat gave the kadyrovtsy credibility of being among the best counterinsurgency fighters in the world. Nowadays, they try to strengthen that image by winning international SWAT competitions and by training alongside the Russian military in the harsh Arctic environment²⁷.

The kadyrovtsy's presence was all that was required for the psy op, and their reputation established urban combat and counterinsurgency as the unit's expected conventional objectives. Beyond these expectations, one of the group's objectives was explicitly stated during the initial days of Russia's operations in Ukraine: this was the assassination of Ukrainian political and societal leaders²⁸, including President Zelensky and his family. Considering the concurrence by Russian military experts that Putin's goal was a quick push to Kyiv in order to institute a regime change²⁹, we can treat the kadyrovtsy as having legitimate conventional objectives – meaning that these given tasks were not just for the sake of a so-called “psy op” but were actually expected to be fulfilled.

Paper wolves

The kadyrovtsy's reputation and mission objectives do not align with what we know of their actual operations. This is evident in both of their major offensive operations thus far, *i.e.*, the drives to Kyiv and Mariupol.

As concerns Kyiv, there is no evidence that the kadyrovtsy engaged in combat³⁰. The thing closest to proof is a video from March 22 of Tushaev and Martynov using a drone³¹. There is nothing that could confirm the location or date of the video, however. Despite the lack of evidence, Kadyrov claims the kadyrovtsy have been engaged since February 24, the first day of the invasion³². If true, this would at least confirm the initial casualties he denied for days. Obviously, this is not what he intended to support with his assertion. Kadyrov also initially claimed that his men would be in the “hottest points” of fighting³³, yet the kadyrovtsy have spent most of their time removed from the frontlines, sometimes by tens of kilometers; some of them never even left Belarus³⁴. As for the Kyiv approach main objective, Ukrainian leaders are still alive, and the kadyrovtsy did not even make it to the city.

On the Mariupol front, the kadyrovtsy have finally entered the fray, or at the very least become more convincing performers. Of the multitude of videos published by various pro-Kadyrov actors, no proof of combat surfaced until March 18, near Mariupol³⁵. But even this was just shooting at invisible targets. A second video emerged on March 19, with an allegedly post-

²⁷ [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 18, 2022; Atle Staalesen, “[Chechen forces are back in the Arctic](#)”, *op. cit.*

²⁸ [BAZA](#), Telegram, February 25, 2022; [The Kyiv Independent](#), Telegram, March 1, 2022.

²⁹ Sumathi Bala, “[Putin seeks ‘regime change’ and will likely invade the rest of Ukraine, says security analyst](#)”, *CNBC*, February 23, 2022; Roger McDermott, “[Russia’s Evolving Military Tactics in the Ukraine War](#)”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, March 9, 2022; Paul Kirby, “[Why has Russia invaded Ukraine and what does Putin want?](#)”, *BBC*, March 28, 2022; Pavel K. Baev, “[Russia’s Strategic Confusion in Ukraine Deepens and Widens](#)”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, March 28, 2022.

³⁰ [Fortanga](#), Telegram, March 13, 2022; Mariya Petkova, “[What role is Chechnya’s Ramzan Kadyrov playing in Ukraine war?](#)”, *Al Jazeera*, March 24, 2022.

³¹ [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 22, 2022.

³² [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 19, 2022.

³³ [SKFO Telegraph](#), Telegram, February 25, 2022.

³⁴ [Security Turkey](#), Telegram, March 7, 2022; [UkraineEnglishUpdates](#), Twitter, March 16, 2022.

³⁵ [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 18, 2022.

engagement clip being released the following day³⁶. Again, these videos only show the kadyrovtsy shooting at something; they are not necessarily engaged in combat. Regarding their explicit goal to take the Azovstal metallurgy plant, the kadyrovtsy attacked it for a few days. In the end, Russian forces simply blew up the plant³⁷ (ironically on the same day that the kadyrovtsy shared their first video of supposed combat). The kadyrovtsy had failed to fulfill their main task once again.

So, what have the kadyrovtsy been up to? The abundance of propaganda videos is useful in this regard. Sometimes, they are repainting their captured trophies and filming their propaganda pieces³⁸. Part of the latter is their “humanitarian work” with the local populations³⁹. There have also been numerous rumors that the kadyrovtsy are acting as the Russian military’s enforcers, preventing desertions⁴⁰.

The kadyrovtsy are being used in such a manner for a few reasons. First, the trophies, staged operations, and humanitarian work all feed into the massive Chechen propaganda machine, which is in turn a large component of the Russian propaganda operations in Ukraine. This is based on Kadyrov’s goal of proving his worth to Putin, in line with his other motivations for being heavily involved in the invasion⁴¹. The kadyrovtsy’s service as enforcers is logical, considering they are already positioned off the frontlines and can utilize their reputation of brutality against Russian forces, just as they tried to against Ukraine.

Despite the kadyrovtsy’s absence from combat, they have still managed to sustain significant casualties. There is no confirmed number, although it is certainly higher than the two that Kadyrov has admitted. However, we know that roughly seventy were killed in a drone strike on February 26⁴². The morgues in Mozyr, Belarus, were allegedly filled with the bodies of dead kadyrovtsy⁴³. Ukrainian officials also claimed to have eliminated an entire unit⁴⁴, which matches eyewitness accounts north of Kyiv.

Why have they failed?

The kadyrovtsy’s failures to fulfill conventional objectives have multiple explanations. The first one is that they suffer from the same problems as the Russian regular forces. Communications have not been secured⁴⁵. Poor logistics and preparations have been substantial issues.

³⁶ [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 19, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 20, 2022.

³⁷ [Voennyi Osvedomitel](#), Telegram, March 18, 2022.

³⁸ [Sovetnik KRA](#) (Umar Daudov), Telegram, March 6, 2022. There are simply too many of such clips to cite here. They can be found throughout the Telegram channels of [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), [Adam Delimkhanov](#), [Magomed Daudov](#), [Akhmed Dudaev](#), [Umar Daudov](#), and [Chingiz Akhmadov](#).

³⁹ [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 10, 2022; [Sovetnik KRA](#), Telegram, March 10, 2022; [Kriminal’nyi Kavkaz](#), Telegram, March 12, 2022; [Groznyi-Inform](#), Telegram, March 16, 2022; [Grozny TV](#), Telegram, March 21, 2022.

⁴⁰ [Ukraina Online](#), Telegram, March 12, 2022; [Anton Shekhovtsov](#), Twitter, March 13, 2022; “[Komandir batal’ona Dudaeva podtverdil ispol’zovanie kadyrovtssev kak ‘zagradotryadov’](#)” [Commander of the Dudaev battalion confirms the use of the kadyrovtsy as ‘enforcers’], *Kavkaz.Realii*, March 21, 2022.

⁴¹ Ivan Ulises Klyszcz, Harold Chambers, “[Kadyrov’s Ukraine Gamble](#)”, Foreign Policy Research Institute, March 28, 2022.

⁴² [Christo Grozev](#), Twitter, February 27, 2022.

⁴³ “[Morgi v Belarusi zapolneny trupami voennykh iz Chechni – press-sekretar’ Tikhonovskoi](#)” [Morgues in Belarus are filled with the corpses of soldiers from Chechnya – Tikhonovskaya’s press-secretary], *Kavkaz.Realii*, March 2, 2022.

⁴⁴ [The Kyiv Independent](#), Telegram, March 1, 2022; [Olexander Scherba](#), Twitter, February 27, 2022.

⁴⁵ “[Razvedka Ukrainy opublikovala dannye o telefonnykh razgovorakh kadyrovtssev](#)” [Ukrainian intelligence publishes data of kadyrovtsy’s phone calls], March 10, 2022.

Complaints from the front, reportedly received by Chechen opposition figures, reveal as much⁴⁶. However, the kadyrovtsy are able to compensate for this deficiency more than other units, as the Chechen authorities have been frequently shipping food and other needed items to them⁴⁷. This is possible because they have not been located on the actual frontlines. Additionally, they have remained bunched up while moving from one place to the next and were part of the initial convoy aimed at Kyiv, which was consistently halted on the road.

The second explanation has nothing to do with the force itself. Coverage of the military buildup and the initial days of the invasion bought into the Kremlin's psy op, with reports frequently accepting the kadyrovtsy at face value for their propagandized reputation. The stories of the kadyrovtsy's counterinsurgency successes – for which there are alternative explanations – have been conflated with the dominance of Chechen independence fighters in urban guerilla warfare, a dominance that has sparked international military interest⁴⁸.

The underlying justification for both these explanations is the same: Russian authoritarianism. The intelligence failures leading up to the invasion, causing logistical failures and the lack of preparation, resulted from a systematic persistence to obscure unpleasant truths while passing information up the chain of command. Putin's psychological operation itself was founded on Kadyrov's domestic propaganda. The Chechen leader has worked hard to have his militia be perceived domestically as an elite fighting force and this has clearly succeeded at the highest levels.

Lessons

This analysis of the kadyrovtsy's actions during Russia's re-invasion of Ukraine allows experts to draw several lessons about both the operation and the kadyrovtsy.

The deployment of the Sever battalion outside of Chechnya for the first time was a significant development that should have set off alarm bells for those watching the military buildup. This retrospectively informs experts about when Putin's military buildup turned from bluff to commitment. There is not yet sufficient public data to say that this definitively was the moment Putin fully committed to an invasion, but the kadyrovtsy mobilization is an important point indicating the seriousness of the buildup and that a full-scale invasion was likely. Other evidence, such as Ramzan's intercepted voice messages and the American intelligence community saying Putin had not decided to invade before February⁴⁹, supports this hypothesis for the timeline.

The kadyrovtsy are usually portrayed as a monolith, but this war is showing that they certainly are not. Cracks in their unity have historically been noted, although these have been in response

⁴⁶ [Khasan Khalitov](#), Telegram, March 1, 2022; [1ADAT](#), YouTube, March 1, 2022; [Khasan Khalitov](#), Telegram, March 12, 2022; 1ADAT, "[Chto zapalo v cerdtse kadyrovskim rabam?](#)" [What's realized in the heart of Kadyrovite slaves?], March 16, 2022; [Khasan Khalitov](#), Telegram, March 17, 2022; [Kavkazskii Uzel](#), Telegram, March 22, 2022.

⁴⁷ [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 8, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 21, 2022.

⁴⁸ David P. Dilegge, Matthew Van Konynenburg, "View from the Wolves' Den: The Chechens and Urban Operations", *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, vol. 13, n° 2, 2002, pp. 171-184.

⁴⁹ "[V raione Maidana ili Kreshchatika tantsy podgotovim. Chto cheloveku s golosom Kadyrova dokladyvali nakanune vtorzheniya Rossii na Ukrainu](#)" ['In Maidan of Kreshchatika district we prepare to dance.' What they reported to somebody with Kadyrov's voice on the eve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine], BBC Russkaya Sluzhba, February 26, 2022; James Risen, "[U.S. intelligence says Putin made a last-minute decision to invade Ukraine](#)", *The Intercept*, March 11, 2022.

to conditions inside Chechnya⁵⁰. This invasion may be exacerbating these sentiments as evidenced in the aforementioned leaked recordings. At a rally in the Chechen capital on February 25, the assembled kadyrovtsy were unenthusiastic and inexperienced, merely resigned to the reality of their impending deployment⁵¹. Residents of Mezhidov's home village even refused his recruitment calls⁵². This perspective from inside Chechnya is supported by the series of leaked audio messages about poor conditions, unpreparedness, and wanting to go home⁵³. Beyond this fracturing along individual lines within the security services, these events also begin to erode the image of the kadyrovtsy's invulnerability inside of Chechnya. While it will undoubtedly take some time, knowledge of the kadyrovtsy's mass casualties and their dissatisfaction will eventually disperse throughout the republic's population. However, as long as sufficient numbers of the kadyrovtsy, especially moving up the chain of command, remain loyal to Kadyrov, general unity within Chechnya's security services will be maintained.

The kadyrovtsy should not be taken at face value. The uncritical treatment of their reputation in the early days of the war aided Russia's psychological warfare and masked the truth about the kadyrovtsy's effectiveness. Recognizing this fact and the impact of Kadyrov's domestic propaganda to hide it is only going to become more important, considering the cracks amongst the kadyrovtsy are likely to grow.

⁵⁰ E. A. Souleimanov *et al.*, "[Frankenstein in Grozny: vertical and horizontal cracks in the foundation of Kadyrov's rule](#)", *Asia Europe Journal*, vol. 17, n° 1, 2019, pp. 87-103.

⁵¹ Neil Hauer, "[Russia's Chechen spear tip in Ukraine](#)", *BNE IntelliNews*, March 8, 2022.

⁵² [Security Turkey](#), Telegram, March 18, 2022.

⁵³ [Khasan Khalitov](#), Telegram, March 1, 2022; [1ADAT](#), YouTube, March 1, 2022; [Khasan Khalitov](#), Telegram, March 12, 2022; [1ADAT](#), "[Chto zapalo v cerdtse kadyrovskim rabam?](#)" [What's realized in the heart of Kadyrovite slaves?], March 16, 2022; [Khasan Khalitov](#), Telegram, March 17, 2022; [Kavkazskii Uzel](#), Telegram, March 22, 2022.

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