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FONDATION  
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## Two months on in the Ukraine war: what role for the kadyrovtsy?

In the first month of the invasion of Ukraine<sup>1</sup>, Chechen Head Ramzan Kadyrov deployed his personal army, the “kadyrovtsy”, to achieve psychological, informational, and conventional objectives. This force, led by a majority of the security services’ most senior commanders<sup>2</sup>, predominantly participated in the assault on Kyiv but withdrew when it stalled out in mid-March. At the same time, a new deployment went to take Mariupol under the guidance of Duma representative Adam Delimkhanov. Other factions of the kadyrovtsy were located near Kharkiv, Kherson, Rubezhnoe, and Zaporozhe.

By the end of the first month, the Kyiv-bound kadyrovtsy had failed to assassinate top Ukrainian leaders, falling back to film propaganda clips and conduct sweep operations (“zachistki”). The Mariupol-based contingent was struggling to seize the Azovstal metallurgy plant. They also were producing videos and carrying out zachistki. Their inability to fulfill conventional objectives was due to (1) a lack of communication security, (2) poor logistics and preparation, and (3) raised expectations for their capabilities amidst a reputation–reality mismatch.

There were three major lessons from the first month. First, retroactively, the kadyrovtsy’s mobilization in early February points to Putin’s timeline for committing to the invasion. Second, the kadyrovtsy are not a monolithic force, dissatisfaction in their ranks has shown through.

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<sup>1</sup> For a full analysis, see Harold Chambers, “[One month on in the Ukraine war: what role for the kadyrovtsy?](#)”, *Notes de la FRS*, n° 16/22, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, April 6, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Alibek Delimkhanov (Deputy Commander, North Caucasus Rosgvardia), Sharip Delimkhanov (Commander, Chechen Rosgvardia), Magomed Tushaev (Commander, Sever Battalion), Khusein Mezhidov (Commander, Yug Battalion), Anzor Bisaev (Commander, OMON “Akhmat-Grozny”), Saidi Lorsankaev (Deputy Commander, SOBR “Akhmat”), and Daniil Martynov (Kadyrov’s advisor and former member of the FSB’s “Alfa” unit).

Finally, the kadyrovtsy should not be taken at face value; their reputation for elite counterinsurgency and guerilla urban warfare capabilities can be discarded.

The second month saw a continuation of operational trends that were beginning to emerge from mid-March onward, as well as important changes in relation to the kadyrovtsy's personnel.

## Recommitting to the east

### Mariupol

The second month of Russia's invasion of Ukraine started with the kadyrovtsy quickly moving further into Mariupol. Troops under Duma MP Adam Delimkhanov shared a video of them raising the republic's unofficial flag – the official flag with the face of the republic's first president Akhmat Kadyrov added – at the Mariupol administration building<sup>3</sup>. The catch here was that the building was not, in fact, the Mariupol administration building<sup>4</sup>. The siege of the Azovstal metallurgy plant continued, with volunteers serving under Delimkhanov's bodyguard Sultan "Borets" Rashaev, the Akhmat Kadyrov Police Regiment (AKPR), and the "Groznyi" Special Police Regiment clearing the rest of the industrial district by conducting zachistki. Kadyrov claimed Mariupol was *almost* taken roughly 26 times in the month<sup>5</sup>.

The command structure in Mariupol is topped by MP Delimkhanov, with the next tier filled by Rashaev and Zamid Chalaev, commander of the notorious AKPR. From here, it becomes interesting, as almost all of the AKPR's commanders deployed too: Deputy Commander Mezhed "Modzhakhed" Utsmigov and unit commanders Isa " Hamas" Taimaskhanov, Timur "Talib" Ibriev, Ilman "Skala" Guchigov, and Mairbek "Medved" Daudov<sup>6</sup>. Taimaskhanov and Ibriev arrived in Mariupol ahead of the rest of the commanders. The substantial deployment of the regiment's command structure contrasts with, for example, that of SOBR Akhmat, another contingent with a substantial presence in Ukraine. This suggests that a larger proportion of the AKPR deployed, meaning there are fewer remaining back in Chechnya. The last of the leaders in Mariupol is Alikhan Shovkhalov of "Groznyi"<sup>7</sup>.

It is worth noting that the AKPR declared its readiness to deploy on March 5 and 8<sup>8</sup>, and "Groznyi" stated it was ready to go to Ukraine on March 9<sup>9</sup>. Despite this early preparedness, neither regiment left Chechnya until much later.

### Luhansk

The second main front for the kadyrovtsy became Luhansk. While most of the command was spread out across the region, the primary objective during the second month was to take Rubezhnoe. This task was entrusted to Aпти Alaudinov, a strange assignment as he fell out of Kadyrov's grace several years ago in connection with an attempted power grab<sup>10</sup>. Some kadyrovtsy were engaged in Rubezhnoe earlier, but their presence became more substantial

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<sup>3</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 24, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> [TRT](#), Telegram, March 25, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> [IStories Media](#), Telegram, April 6, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 14, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 3, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 7, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 5, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 8, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 9, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> [1ADAT](#), Telegram, March 17, 2022; Neil Hauer, "[Big Trouble in Little Chechnya](#)" *Riddle*, November 4, 2019.

during the month. As Rubezhnoe was secondary to Mariupol, the battle for it was not documented by Chechen sources as thoroughly, meaning the kadyrovtsy's day-to-day operations there are unknown at this time.

Alaudinov was joined in Rubezhnoe by Adam Khizriev and his OMON "Akhmat-Krepost" unit<sup>11</sup>. Khizriev's history of violence against Chechnya's population has been documented by diaspora activists<sup>12</sup>. Alaudinov was also joined by a unit led by Ismail Aguev<sup>13</sup>, who previously commanded the Kurchaloevskii district police (now headed by his brother). The last addition to the Rubezhnoe contingent were troops from the SOBR "Akhmat" Training Center led by Deputy Commander Khasein Muduev<sup>14</sup>. It is unclear whether these trainees were the same fighters who declared their readiness to deploy under Combat Officer Abuspyan Vainakhov in March<sup>15</sup>; the difference in leadership, however, suggests that they are not.

The Kyiv-front commanders (*i.e.*, Alibek and Sharip Delimkhanov, Magomed Tushaev, Anzor Bisaev, Daniil Martynov, and Saidi Lorsankaev) have redeployed to Luhansk. For most of them, specific locations are not provided by Kadyrov. The Delimkhanov brothers and Martynov were in Luhansk at the beginning of April<sup>16</sup>. Alibek later briefly visited the Rubezhnoe front after his promotion in Grozny<sup>17</sup>. Martynov was going from town to town on *zachistki*, including in Popasna and Stepnoe<sup>18</sup>. The rest of the limited number of videos featured typical propaganda of the leadership in action: Sharip looking like a fighting general and coordinating assaults, Bisaev rescuing a wounded soldier, and so forth<sup>19</sup>. Tushaev was less visible in propaganda clips but continued operating alongside Martynov and Bisaev<sup>20</sup>.

Of greater import, Saidi Lorsankaev resurfaced somewhere in Luhansk, now at the helm of both his unit (SOBR "Akhmat") and Yug Battalion<sup>21</sup>. Previously, near Kyiv, "Yug" was commanded by Khusein Mezhidov. He did not return to the front from Chechnya.

## Tactical development

The kadyrovtsy made two noticeable adjustments in their tactics during the second month. First, their everyday operational style was aligned with their capabilities and standard practices. Second, their operational precautions were strengthened.

During the second month of the invasion, the kadyrovtsy increasingly carried out *zachistki*, particularly in Mariupol<sup>22</sup>. These sweep operations are more in line with their training and their veterans' experience from the counterterrorism operation in Chechnya in the 2000s. The reliance on *zachistki* can also be explained by the differing realities of the fronts between the first and second months. In the first month, the kadyrovtsy were held up in the stalled push to

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<sup>11</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 29, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 30, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> [Security Turkey](#), Telegram, March 19, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 27, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 9, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 3, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 20, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 6, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 15, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 4, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 7, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 13, 2022.

<sup>18</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 13, 2022; [ChP Chechnya](#), Telegram, April 22, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 2, 2022; [Grozny-Inform](#), Telegram, April 12, 2022; [ChP Chechnya](#), Telegram, April 20, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> [Akhmed Dudaev](#), Telegram, April 9, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 13, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 5, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> There are too many videos to link to here. They can be found on Kadyrov's [Telegram channel](#).

Kyiv. In the second month, Mariupol has been under a tightening siege and the other contested cities and towns were accessible *via* the already occupied Luhansk and Donetsk regions. This provided the units with greater security as they were less exposed to Ukrainian drone strikes, with which they were afflicted on multiple fronts in the early stages of the invasion.

The kadyrovtsy increasingly utilized drones<sup>23</sup>, both for airstrikes and for reconnaissance. The use of DJI drones, controlled from handheld electronic devices, for reconnaissance is the more important of the two purposes. This is because the DJI drones were more prolific among kadyrovtsy units and were used on a daily basis to strengthen operational precautions. Increasing visibility during urban guerilla warfare is crucial to mitigating the risks to a unit.

## Eventual successes

The second month saw the kadyrovtsy achieve two of their main conventional objectives: taking Mariupol and Rubezhnoe. April 21 was marked by Kadyrov and Adam Delimkhanov declaring “*Mariupol nash!*” [Mariupol is ours!]<sup>24</sup>. A few days later, Kadyrov announced that Alaudinov’s contingent, along with the forces of the so-called Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR), had fully taken Rubezhnoe on April 25<sup>25</sup>.

That the kadyrovtsy managed to succeed in the second month can be attributed to several things. The first reason is the kadyrovtsy’s geographic locations during the month. They had their backs to long-occupied regions, contrasting with the first month’s mad dash for Kyiv. These positions granted them greater security and allowed for easier logistical support. The second reason is their tactical adjustments. Returning to their operational comfort zone with actual reconnaissance capabilities greatly increased their chances of success. The third and final reason is having more support from the air and from their compatriots. They had significant bombardment support at Azovstal and operated in closer coordination with other troops in Rubezhnoe. Doubts loom over their successes, however. Was this support so great because the kadyrovtsy truly achieved nothing, but rather followed behind those troops that actually fought in sieges and battles? A message from an LPR soldier matches an earlier complaint by a Donetsk commander<sup>26</sup>, suggesting this may be the case. More messages from frontline troops would confirm fully.

## Noteworthy kadyrovtsy

There have been repeated claims since the beginning of the invasion that many or all of the men in the Kadyrov family are fighting in Ukraine<sup>27</sup> – obviously, Ramzan was the exception. However, not until this past month was any proof provided. Khalid Kadyrov, Ramzan’s cousin, was first interviewed in Mariupol in mid-April<sup>28</sup>, and has served as the Kadyrov family’s “poster boy” in Ukraine ever since. He is the only one of the claimed “twenty-four” to appear in propaganda<sup>29</sup>. According to these clips, not only is he participating in the siege, but he helped plan the “storm”

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<sup>23</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 2, 2022; [Ichkeria Info](#), Telegram, April 14, 2022; [Iskhak Chalaev](#), Telegram, April 18, 2022; [ChP Chechnya](#), Telegram, April 21, 2022.

<sup>24</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 21, 2022; [Adam Delimkhanov](#), Telegram, April 21, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 25, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> [Kavkazskii Uzel](#), Telegram, March 22, 2022; “[Pro chechentsev](#)” [About Chechens], April 27, 2022.

<sup>27</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 1, 2022; [Umar Daudov](#), Telegram, April 2, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> [Chingiz Akhmadov](#), Telegram, April 16, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> [Grozny-Inform](#), Telegram, April 16, 2022.

of the Azovstal metallurgy plant with Delimkhanov and Rashaev<sup>30</sup>. The claim that Kadyrov family members are fighting in Ukraine is important to Ramzan's desired portrayal of the family as the paradigm of Chechen masculinity, a central project in his identity-building efforts throughout his rule. While Ramzan's cousins, the Delimkhanov brothers, have been in Ukraine since day 1, they are too high-ranking to participate in actual fighting. This is why Adam began to send videos of him as a fighting general, rather than being stationed back at a command post<sup>31</sup>.

There are several individuals outside of the Mariupol command group whose presence should be noted, as they are known to have carried out the Kadyrov regime's dirty work in the past and present. At the end of the war's first month, Ruslan "Dobryi" Geremeev deployed but was soon injured, falling back to a military hospital in Novocherkassk<sup>32</sup>. He is suspected of organizing the assassination of major opposition politician Boris Nemtsov. He has nearly recovered and may return to the front in the coming weeks<sup>33</sup>. At the beginning of April, observers noticed the presence of Usman Mamadiev<sup>34</sup>. Mamadiev is the assumed killer of Imran "Mansur Saryi" Aliev, a Chechen dissident blogger residing in Lille in 2020. The final noteworthy individual is Rizvan (also called Ramzan) Kuduzov<sup>35</sup>. He attempted to blackmail Khasan Khalitov, a Turkey-based opposition blogger, *via* his sister. Khalitov accused Kuduzov of acting on the direct order of the Chechen Speaker of Parliament, Magomed Daudov<sup>36</sup>. The deployment of these individuals means two things. It indicates what type of "soldier" is being entrusted with taking Mariupol – and closely interacting with civilians. It also demonstrates that key individual assets are being sent by Kadyrov to Ukraine, meaning his ability to gather reinforcements is strained.

The idea that the Chechen regime's personnel resources are becoming more limited is further supported by the new deployments of volunteer fighters. These volunteer units are shipping out every week or two from the Russian Spetsnaz University in Gudermes (Chechnya) to various locations across the eastern front. However, the members of these units are not just Chechens. Although it is unclear how the ethnic composition of these units is distributed, they allegedly include fighters from across all of Russia. This serves two purposes for the Kadyrov regime. First, it allows them to dilute their ongoing personnel investment in the invasion, an important concern considering the accumulation of casualties and their desire to partially hedge their bets. Additionally, since the units are being trained in and departing from Chechnya, the regime can continue to capitalize on the image of sending soldiers to the front despite contributing fewer men. Second, this volunteer process allows Kadyrov to reposition Chechnya inside of the current Russian nationalist project. As Chechnya, and the North Caucasus at large, are typically precluded from Russian nationalist ideals, being able to now adopt the identity of the backbone of the motherland's protection is crucial for Kadyrov. Not only does inserting Chechnya into Russian nationalism in such a manner redemonstrates his loyalty to Putin, but it may help in the hypothetical post-Putin political landscape.

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<sup>30</sup> [Adam Delimkhanov](#), Telegram, April 21, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> [Umar Daudov](#), Telegram, April 6, 2022; [Grozny TV](#), Telegram, April 21, 2022.

<sup>32</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 26, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 29, 2022; [Mark Krutov](#), Twitter, March 30, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 13, 2022.

<sup>34</sup> "[Predlogaemyi ubiitsa blogera Mansura Starogo zamechen sredi kadyrovtssev v Ukraine](#)" [Suspected killer of blogger Mansur the Older is among kadyrovtsy in Ukraine], *Kavkaz.Realii*, April 4, 2022.

<sup>35</sup> [Mysli Islama](#), Telegram, April 13, 2022

<sup>36</sup> Harold Chambers, "[Violence against women takes centre stage in Chechnya](#)", *Lossi 36 Weekly*, n° 4, January 31, 2022.

Finally, Ramzan Khalitov – the older brother the commander of aforementioned dissident Khasan Khalitov – is commanding 100 men from the third volunteer deployment<sup>37</sup>. Ramzan is assumed to have been forced into the invasion, both as recompense for his brother’s actions and as a method of further attempting to shame Khasan within Chechnya<sup>38</sup>. His deployment is further interesting in light of Kuduzov’s presence, as Kuduzov was not spotted in Ukraine until after Khalitov left Chechnya. This suggests that Kuduzov might be serving as Khalitov’s handler in Ukraine, ensuring he continues to play his role. So far, Ramzan Khalitov is the only immediate family member of a prominent dissident reported to be fighting in Ukraine.

## Commanders under question?

Russia’s re-focusing on eastern Ukraine has led some of the commanders who were previously based near Kyiv to relocate to these new frontlines. This shift in deployments has seemingly revealed three cases of tensions between Kadyrov and his commanders.

The first case is evident in the deployment to Mariupol. When the kadyrovtsy turned their focus to taking Mariupol, they were not led by someone already within the chain-of-command, but rather by Duma representative Adam Delimkhanov. Not a fighting commander, he was joined by two other notorious leaders: Sultan Rashaev and Zamid Chalaev.

This passing of the baton did not take place because the already-deployed commanders were tired from fighting – by all accounts, the kadyrovtsy did not see kinetic engagement on the Kyiv front. Rather, Adam Delimkhanov’s deployment underscores both how disappointed Kadyrov was by failure outside Kyiv and how important success in Mariupol was. Delimkhanov has long been Kadyrov’s go-to man for key objectives: the assassination of rival warlord Sulim Yamadaev, extorting Russia’s businessmen, and targeting dissidents in Turkey<sup>39</sup>. As the kadyrovtsy’s global reputation as an elite counterinsurgency force has been thoroughly debunked by their performance thus far in Ukraine<sup>40</sup>, Delimkhanov had to attempt to restore some of that lost reputation.

The deployment of Chalaev’s unit is clearly to help with that objective. The AKPR is the unit that Kadyrov uses as the international face of the kadyrovtsy’s SWAT-counterinsurgency capabilities<sup>41</sup>. This further shows how important taking Mariupol was to Kadyrov, and how much he was willing to risk in order to achieve this goal. As the unit is heavily responsible for the most brutal oppression in Chechnya<sup>42</sup>, it is also clear that the Chechen leader trusts Chalaev to provide a more successful return on this investment compared to the Kyiv assault.

In the second case, Saidi Lorsankaev’s reemergence hints at Khusein Mezhidov’s fall from grace. Lorsankaev, who was promoted to the position of deputy commander of SOBR “Akhmat” only recently, in May 2021, had mostly disappeared from propaganda following the February 26

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<sup>37</sup> [ChP Chechnya](#), Telegram, April 8, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 11, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> [Chingiz Akhmadov](#), Telegram, April 22, 2022; [ChP Chechnya](#), Telegram, April 22, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Hassan Abbas, “[Delimkhanov Placed on Interpol Wanted List](#)”, *North Caucasus Weekly*, Jamestown Foundation, 10(17), May 1, 2009; “[Bratya Ltd.](#)” [Brothers Ltd.], *Proekt Media*, July 14, 2022; “[V Turtsii peredano v sud delo o podgotovke pokushenii na chechenskikh oppozitsionerov](#)” [In Turkey a case about the preparation of assassinations of Chechen opposition members was submitted to court], *Kavkaz.Realii*, February 15, 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Harold Chambers, “[One month on in the Ukraine war: what role for the kadyrovtsy?](#)”, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 18, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Elena Milashina, “[Kazn’ posle smerti](#)” [Execution after death], *Novaya Gazeta*, February 15, 2021.

drone strike on kadyrovtsy on the outskirts of Bucha<sup>43</sup>. Despite his lack of experience, as of April 5, he commands both SOBR “Akhmat” and the Yug Battalion, two of the kadyrovtsy’s most significant units, in Ukraine<sup>44</sup>. The Yug Battalion normally belongs to Khusein Mezhidov, the star of Kadyrov’s earlier propaganda<sup>45</sup>.

The appointment of Lorsankaev to lead Yug Battalion has already sparked rumors about the whereabouts of Mezhidov within the Chechen opposition. The 1ADAT movement noticed the absence of Mezhidov from propaganda at the end of March, and claimed, without evidence, that Mezhidov and Magomed Tushaev are being held in a “kadyrovite basement” – in other words, the basement of a police station typically used for torture<sup>46</sup>. The reason for their supposed imprisonment is as punishment for selling trophies from Ukraine without Kadyrov’s approval. As the veracity of such a claim is nearly impossible to verify, Kadyrov has opened himself up to the persistence of this rumor. Earlier in the war, the false story of Tushaev’s death continued to spread for almost a month after it had been proven that he lived.

Leaving aside 1ADAT’s more recent, fantastical assertion, there are two more practical narratives explaining Lorsankaev’s replacement of Mezhidov. The first is that Mezhidov failed in his recruitment drive, adding to his failures outside Kyiv, leading Kadyrov to force him to sit out the assault on Mariupol. Leaked audio, uploaded by a channel known for publishing kadyrovtsy recordings, reports that he failed to recruit fighters from even his home village, which in turn supports this narrative<sup>47</sup>. The second narrative is simply that Kadyrov, also thinking that Lorsankaev could benefit from the experience, did not want to risk losing Mezhidov. This idea appears logical but is undermined by the presence of the Delimkhanovs, Chalaev, and other leaders, as well as the redeployments of members of SOBR “Akhmat” and Yug Battalion.

The third and final case is the redeployment of the Kyiv-front commanders – who include the top-ranking security officials in Chechnya and the whole North Caucasus – to take smaller towns around Luhansk. This relegated them to minor objectives while the disgraced Alaudinov and literal trainees seized Rubezhnoe. That none of the top commanders were assigned to join the assault on Rubezhnoe seems to convey Kadyrov’s dissatisfaction with them pretty clearly.

Overall, these cases show the problems that Kadyrov will continue to face as the performance of his personal army cannot measure up to its reputation. This will only be compounded as veteran leadership continues to leave the fighting ranks, leaving the Chechen governor with limited options for reliable, trusted commanders. This phenomenon is part of a larger governance cycle in the Kadyrov administration<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> [“Saidi Lorsankaev naznachen zamestitelem komandira SOBR ‘TEREK’ UFSVNG RF po ChR”](#) [Saidi Lorsankaev becomes the deputy commander of SOBR ‘TEREK’ of the Rosgvardia in the Chechen Republic], *Grozny-Inform*, May 18, 2021; [Olexander Scherba](#), Twitter, February 27, 2022.

<sup>44</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, April 5, 2022.

<sup>45</sup> [RIA Novosti](#), Telegram, February 26, 2022.

<sup>46</sup> [1ADAT](#), Telegram, March 31, 2022; [1ADAT](#), April 4, 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Free Channel, [“Khusein Mezhidov – Ne smog naiti dobrovoltagev – Za 300 000 Ruble!”](#) [Khusein Mezhidov cannot find volunteer fighters for 300,000 rubles], YouTube, March 18, 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Harold Chambers, [“Moving Beyond the Chechen Troika”](#), *Riddle*, April 15, 2022.

## Lessons

Some of the lessons on the kadyrovtsy's effectiveness, both among their ranks and in their public portrayal, from the first month have been further exemplified during the second month. While continuing to prove the force's monolithic illusion, the kadyrovtsy are still appraised by many based on the face value of their propaganda. This latter fact is clearly not a good thing as the war drags onward.

First, the kadyrovtsy are still, unfortunately, being taken at face value. The movement to paint them as "Tik Tok warriors" accepts their propaganda as it is. In other words, it buys into exactly what the kadyrovtsy are trying to sell. As the non-viral clips of Kadyrov's army in Mariupol show, and as this paper previously addressed, they are not just goofing around, but conducting *zachistki* at a high frequency. Are the kadyrovtsy an elite military force? No, but they never were. Their expertise has always been terrorizing civilian populations. Portraying them as "Tik Tok warriors" belies the very real harm they pose to Ukrainians in occupied territories. Some kadyrovtsy were named as participants in the Bucha massacres. The kadyrovtsy were all around the Kyiv suburbs, from large towns to small villages. And now mobile crematoria are reportedly in Mariupol, where even more notoriously cruel units have been deployed.

The second continued lesson is that the internal cracks seem more evident. The tensions between Kadyrov and his top commanders are indicative of the kadyrovtsy's poor performance, as well as the state of the invasion in general. The duration of Kadyrov's dissatisfaction is unlikely to affect the war effort, but it could have repercussions domestically if he is losing control of the Chechen security elites. Whether the situation is this dire is not yet certain, as most of the regime's inner workings remain secret. The propaganda efforts have exposed these operations to greater publicity, but they may return to more opaqueness when the invasion ends. Leaks from the kadyrovtsy rank-and-file about the dissatisfaction have continued throughout the second month of the war<sup>49</sup>. These messages do appear to be spreading around Chechnya as the Chechen authorities have struggled to recruit new soldiers.

There are also a couple of new lessons to be drawn from the second month. The first one is that Kadyrov's manpower resources appear to be strained. The Chechen leader, who committed so many men during the opening phase of the invasion, is now being more conservative with deploying reinforcements. Only about half of the units that previously said they were ready to deploy have gone to the front. The AKPR, the "Groznyi" special police regiment, and parts of SOBR "Akhmat" issued videos declaring their readiness and have since joined the fray<sup>50</sup>, but most of the new units are volunteers. The police units of Murad Chalaev in Nozhai-Yurt, Iskhak Chalaev in Gudermes, Rustam Aguev in Kurchaloevsky district, and Rustam Geremeev in Shelkovskii district have yet to leave for the war<sup>51</sup>. That Kadyrov is sending his highest profile regiments, heavily supplemented by volunteer units, suggests that his calculus about the war effort has changed slightly. Preserving his capacity for violence in Chechnya seems to have greater weight in comparison to proving his loyalty to Putin and commitment to the invasion.

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<sup>49</sup> [Khasan Khalitov](#), Telegram, March 31, 2022; [Khasan Khalitov](#), Telegram, April 1, 2022; Khasan Khalitov, Telegram, April 2, 2022 [[1](#)] [[2](#)]; 1ADAT, "[Vernuvshiesya iz Ukrainy odnorazovye ne khotyat obratno](#)" [Disposables returning from Ukraine do not want to go back], YouTube, April 20, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 5, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 6, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 8, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 9, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 15, 2022.

<sup>51</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 10, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 11, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 12, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 17, 2022.



This analysis is supported by the fact that he is combining his most elite forces with ones that are not fully Chechen, while his medium status units stay at home despite earlier war cries.

Second, tensions are emerging with other troops. The kadyrovtsy are alienating their compatriots because of their size and ineffectiveness. Despite their significant numbers, they are unsuccessful when acting as a conventional military force rather than as a counterinsurgency force; plus, they continue to station themselves away from the fighting. The Donetsk commander who criticized the kadyrovtsy was confronted by Adam Delimkhanov<sup>52</sup>. The post by the LNR soldier suggests that more of such confrontations could occur, as war weariness brings latent conflicts into the open<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 10, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 11, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 12, 2022; [Ramzan Kadyrov](#), Telegram, March 17, 2022.

<sup>53</sup> ["Pro chechentsev"](#) [About Chechens], April 27, 2022.

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