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Chechen Warlord Hints at More Attacks

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The leader of the North Caucasus insurgency said he was alive and well after federal forces said they might have killed him, and he hinted he would prove it by organizing more attacks, according to Radio Free Europe.

A man purporting to be Doku Umarov phoned Radio Free Europe late last week to deny reports that quoted unidentified officials as saying he might have been killed in a March 28 assault on an insurgent base in Ingushetia.

"They carried out a special operation. Several of our mujahedin died. They are saying that I died, but this is not true," he said. "They'll get an answer soon. They will hear news."

Umarov styles himself the emir of the Caucasus and leads a persistent Islamist insurgency that followed two devastating wars Russia fought against separatists in Chechnya following the 1991 Soviet collapse.

He has claimed responsibility for major attacks in the mostly Muslim provinces in the North Caucasus as well as a suicide bombing that killed 37 people at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport in January.

Umarov has been erroneously reported dead several times in the past. He told Radio Free Europe that he was "perfectly healthy."

Authorities said 17 militants were killed in the March 28 operation in Ingushetia and that Umarov might have been killed, but that it would not be clear without DNA test results.

Islamist web sites confirmed that a top lieutenant of Umarov, Supyan Abdullayev, was among the dead.

The proximity of the North Caucasus to the Black Sea coastal resort city of Sochi, site of the 2014 Winter Olympics, is of particular concern for the Kremlin, which has vowed to beef up security for the event.

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