

Umarov Urges Militants Not to Kill Civilians

February 05, 2012

The  Moscow Times

Militants fighting to carve an Islamic state from Russia's southern flank should avoid attacks on citizens now that they are protesting Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's 12-year rule, the leader of the insurgency said. ☒

In a video posted on a rebel-affiliated website Friday, Islamist militant leader Doku Umarov said rallies against disputed elections that gave Putin's ruling United Russia party a parliamentary majority last year showed his support had fallen. ☒

The video is a sharp departure from previous statements made by Umarov, who has claimed responsibility for attacks including a January 2011 Moscow airport bombing that killed 37 people and who has promised a year of "blood and tears." ☒

"Today's events ... show the population of Russia doesn't support Putin," said Umarov, leader of fighters who wage nearly daily violence he says is aimed at throwing off Russian rule from the mostly Muslim North Caucasus region.

✖ "Therefore I order all groups who are carrying out or plan to carry out special operations on the territory of Russia to limit them if the peaceful population will suffer," Umarov said.

Umarov said his militants would continue carrying out attacks on police and government targets. ✖

Umarov's statement appears aimed to capitalize on the opposition's challenge to Putin, who sent troops to the North Caucasus province of Chechnya in 1999, during a previous stint as prime minister, to crush a separatist government and re-establish Kremlin rule. ✖

Putin, president from 2000 to 2008, is expected to win a new six-year term in a presidential election next month.

✖ The insurgency, now most active in the provinces surrounding Chechnya, is rooted in the war that began in 1999 and a previous ✖1994-96 war the Kremlin waged against Chechen rebels. ✖

In addition to the airport bombing last year, Umarov's Caucasus Emirate has claimed responsibility for a series of attacks in the Russian heartland including twin suicide blasts that killed 40 people on the Moscow metro in March 2010 and the bombing of a train between Moscow and St. Petersburg that killed 26 people in November 2009.

✖ One of the last surviving original leaders of the Chechen rebellion that began in the early 1990s, Umarov was placed on the U.S. State Department's list of terrorists in 2010.

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