

Militant Claims Responsibility for Kazan Mufti Attack

By [Jonathan Earle](#)

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A man who describes himself as the “amir of Tatarstan's mujahedin” claiming responsibility for the attacks on Muslim clergy in Kazan last month.

An Islamist militant has claimed responsibility for attacks on two moderate Muslim leaders last month in the republic of Tatarstan, as regional investigators announced that they are searching for the militant and his associate.

Meanwhile, the republic's legislature has moved to tighten controls of religious organizations amid rising fears that Islamic radicalism has spread from the troubled North Caucasus region to the more secular central Russian republic.

In a grainy video that appeared on YouTube on Friday, a man later identified as Islamist militant Rais Mingaleyev said he ordered the attacks that seriously wounded Tatarstan's top

religious leader and killed another prominent official on July 19.

The man in the video, who appears in a forest with an assault rifle under a banner with Arabic lettering, refers to himself as the amir of Tatarstan's mujahedin and threatens to carry out further attacks against "enemies of Allah." He also demands that the region's imams adopt Shariah.

Rais Suleimanov, deputy director of the Center for Eurasian and International Studies at Kazan State University, identified the man in the video as Mingaleev.

"He's using the video to announce a jihad, but it's very difficult to say whether he actually planned the attacks. He might simply be trying to take credit for somebody else's dirty work," Suleimanov said by telephone Monday.

In an earlier video, which appeared shortly after the killings, the same man pledges allegiance to Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov, Suleimanov added.

Investigators are searching for Mingaleev, 36, and Robert Valeyev, 35, on suspicion of planning the attacks on Valiulla Yakupov and chief mufti Ildus Faizov, the regional Investigative Committee said in a statement Friday.

Seven people have already been arrested in connection with the attacks, including 57-year-old Rustem Gataullin — board chairman at the Idel-Hajj company and a suspected mastermind.

Law enforcement officials have announced that the motive in at least one attack appeared to be related to Faizov's business interests, as well as "ideological disagreements."

The investigation has been condemned as heavy-handed by some Muslim leaders. Nail Nabiullin, head of the Al-Ikhlâs mosque in Kazan, said last month that police had detained 400 to 600 Muslims and conducted about 160 raids.

"The principle 'grab everyone in succession' is causing even greater distrust toward the police among the population," Nabiullin told Interfax.

Meanwhile, the regional legislature passed a law banning foreigners from founding religious organizations and requiring additional checks on religious leaders trained abroad, a response to suspected links between Wahhabists from abroad and local militants.

Faizov, 49, received multiple injuries, including two broken legs, after assailants detonated three car bombs in his SUV in Kazan the day before the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Yakupov, a prominent cleric who headed the Spiritual Board of Muslims' education department, died minutes earlier after being shot by unidentified gunmen outside his house in Kazan.

President Vladimir Putin has promised that the perpetrators will be punished.

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