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Kadyrov's Photo of Islamic State Militant's Corpse Revealed as Fake

By The Moscow Times

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Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov

A day after proclaiming the death of Islamic State commander Tarkhan Batirashvili on his Instagram account, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has apparently backtracked, having deleted both the claim and the photograph used to substantiate it.

The news of the death of Batirashvili, better known as Omar "the Chechen" al-Shishani, was taken with a grain of salt by many observers, who said Kadyrov had been known for making such claims in the past with other Islamic extremists only to be proven wrong.

In 2013, Kadyrov had repeatedly proclaimed the death of Doku Umarov, the leader of the Caucasus Emirate — announcements later proven to be unsubstantiated. The Federal Security Service confirmed Umarov's death in April this year, after Kadyrov had announced it repeatedly last winter.

This time, it took only a few hours for journalists to point out that that the photo Kadyrov used, purportedly showing Batirashvili's dead body, had actually been published more than a year earlier by Lebanese news agency Almanar News.

The photo was posted Thursday alongside the message: "Tarkhan Batirashvili, the enemy of Islam who called himself Omar al-Shishani, has been killed. [The same fate belies] anyone who even thinks about threatening Russia and the Chechen people."

In a videotaped address to Russian President Vladimir Putin posted on the Internet in September, Islamic State members threatened to wage war on the North Caucasus, a predominantly Muslim region that for years battled an insurgency led by Islamic fundamentalists.

Both the photo and the statement had been deleted from Kadyrov's Instagram account on Friday.

There has been no official confirmation on whether the fake photo means Batirashvili is still alive. On Thursday, the Islamic State released a 17-minute audio recording from leader Abu Bakr Baghdadi, who defiantly vowed that the terrorist group would expand its campaign — an apparent bid to debunk rumors that he and his men had been killed in U.S. airstrikes.

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