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Kadyrov Says 480 Chechens Have Joined Islamic State

By Anna Dolgov

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Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov

Nearly 500 Chechens have joined the Islamic State terrorist organization, the head of Russia's mainly Muslim North Caucasus republic of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov said, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

Of the known 480 Chechens who have allegedly traveled to fight alongside Islamic State, 200 men have already been killed, Kadyrov said, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported Sunday. He did not specify where he obtained his estimate.

Kadyrov claimed that government agents have "brought back" another 47 Chechen men, who are believed to have been drafted into the Islamic State "by means of deception," RIA Novosti reported.

Kadyrov accused Western governments and their allies of supporting "terrorists" in the

Middle East. “Today, Western countries, Europe and other Arab nations, which finance terrorists, have no interest is seeing Syria recover. They have their own interests [there],” he said, RIA Novosti reported.

His remarks echo the rhetoric of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who recently accused the United States of backing terrorism and playing a “double game” in the Middle East.

“It’s always hard to play a double game — to declare a fight against terrorists but at the same time try to use some of them to move the pieces on the Middle Eastern chessboard in your own favor,” Putin told the Valdai Club, an international policymakers' gathering in Russia's seaside village of Sochi, the Kremlin press office reported on Oct. 22.

Kadyrov praised Chechnya's Muslim clerics for discouraging young men from joining radical Islamic groups.

“If our spiritual leaders did not conduct targeted ideological work, then the number of Chechens as well as representatives of other regions of the [North] Caucasus who are fighting alongside terrorists would have been higher — there would have been thousands of them,” Kadyrov was cited by RIA Novosti as saying.

Kadyrov casts himself as a devout Muslim, and opened the Akhmad Kadyrov Mosque in Chechnya's capital Grozny in 2008. He has largely suppressed radical Islamist fighters, even as the neighboring republic of Dagestan has seen scores of radical Islamist insurgencies in recent years.

In total, almost 650 criminal cases are being investigated in Russia against Russians fighting for the Islamic State, according to Prosecutor General Yury Chaika, RIA Novosti reported on Nov. 10.

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