

# Kremlin Reacts to Kadyrov's Attacks on 'Jackals' Opposed to Putin

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Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov meets Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin in Moscow.

The Kremlin on Wednesday commented for the first time on calls by Chechen strongman leader Ramzan Kadyrov to crack down on “jackals” and “enemies of the people” who oppose President Vladimir Putin.

Kadyrov's statements have alarmed opposition figures, already increasingly marginalized amid a crackdown on protest by authorities. Kadyrov, who enjoys Putin's support as leader of the Chechen republic, is seen as particularly dangerous — Chechens with links to him have been implicated in the gunning down opposition politician Boris Nemtsov outside the Kremlin last year.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov offered opposition figures little solace. According to the Interfax news agency, he told reporters on Wednesday that people shouldn't “escalate” the situation, but read Kadyrov's words calmly.

“If you read attentively, it speaks of the non-systemic opposition. What is the non-systemic opposition? It is those who are outside the legitimate political arena. It is those whose activities do not stay within the bounds of the law and [who] are ready to break laws, including in ways that damage the country,” Peskov said, according to Interfax. The systemic opposition typically refers to established political parties in the Russian Duma widely seen as subservient to the Kremlin.

“Of course these are people who at a minimum are not helping with the stability and flourishing of our state,” Peskov added.

Peskov was also asked about veiled threats against specific opposition figures and media outlets. In an article published on Monday in the Izvestia newspaper, Kadyrov lambasted lackeys of the West who were out to “destroy our country,” and said media companies including radio station Echo Moskvyy and television channel Dozhd were broadcasting information “steeped in hatred for Russia.”

Magomed Daudov, chair of the Chechen parliament and a close ally of Kadyrov, meanwhile posted a photo on Instagram of Kadyrov with a large Chechen sheepdog straining at its leash with a message referring to a number of prominent opposition figures. It said the dog's “fangs were itching” to attack them.

In another Instagram post, Kadyrov suggested interning members of the opposition at psychological wards in Chechen villages.

Peskov refused to endorse or denounce the statements. “I'm not ready to comment on anything said about Echo Moskvyy, Dozhd and the rest. I didn't read [these parts],” he said.

Though more strident, Kadyrov's rhetoric dovetails with many of the slogans emanating from the Kremlin in recent years. President Vladimir Putin has warned of malign foreign influences and “fifth columnists” undermining state security, while a series of laws have been passed restricting foreign involvement in non-governmental organizations and media firms in Russia.

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