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Attack on Daughter of Kadyrov Critic Underscores Putin's Chechen Problem

Russian fighter Fedor Emelianenko's daughter was attacked by unknown assailant after criticism of Kadyrov's behavior.

By Matthew Bodner

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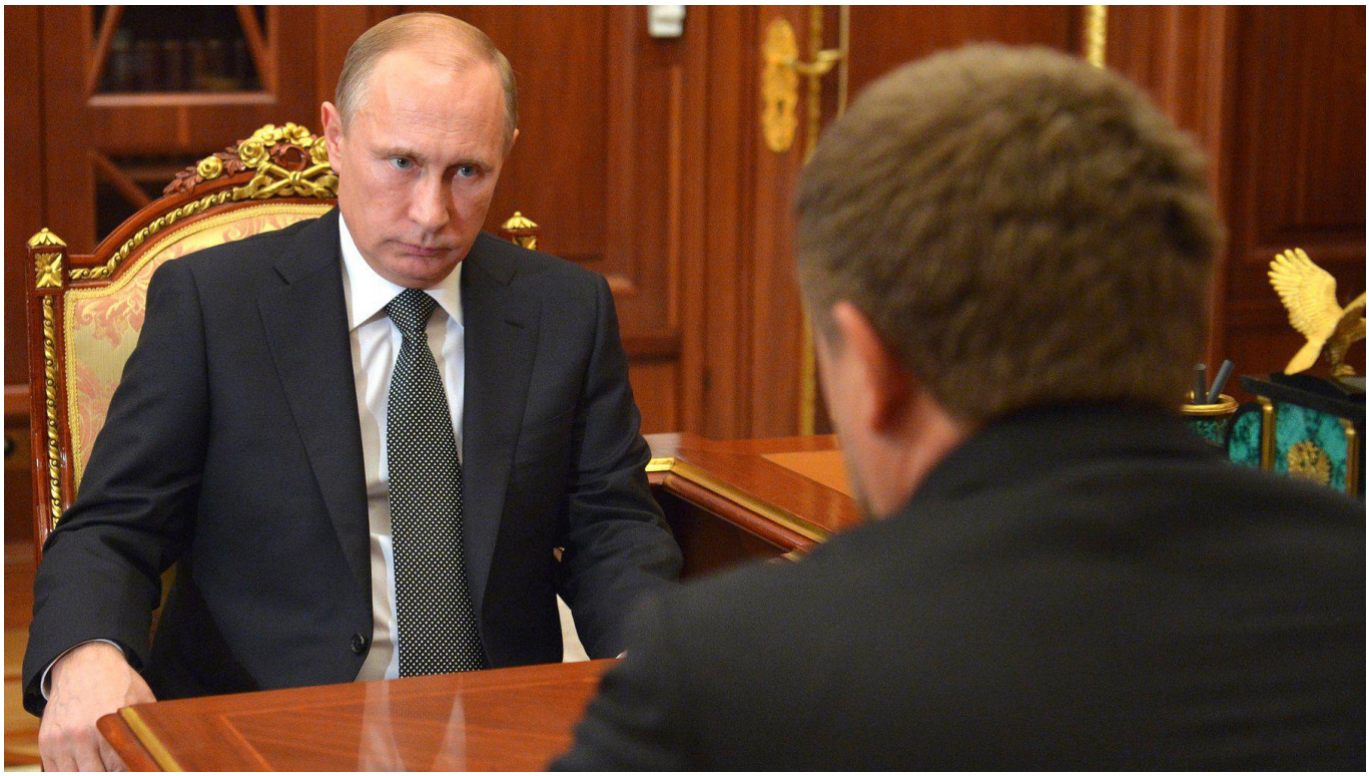

Kremlin Press Service

While the rules guiding self-censorship in the Russian media are generally opaque and ever changing, there is one axiom you don't ignore: never offend Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov. Or else.

Last week, Kadyrov's special status reared its head outside the usual realm of journalism, making waves in Russia's rough-and-tumble world of professional fighting, after the Chechen leader entered his preteen sons in a mixed martial arts (MMA) competition in Grozny. One of Kadyrov's boys even won by knocking out his opponent. The fight caused a

national scandal, leading prominent figures to criticize the Chechen leader for allowing young children to perform such violence.

Days later, almost 2,000 kilometers to the north, on her walk home from school on a Moscow street, the daughter of beloved Russian mixed martial artist Fedor Emelianenko was assaulted by an unnamed assailant. A reported punch to the chest sent the 16-year-old girl to the hospital, and only on October 12 did Russian tabloids catch wind of it. No one has been formally accused, but speculation is flying that Kadyrov or his men are behind it.

The reason for such speculation is simple: Emelianenko last week got into a heated rhetorical spout with Kadyrov over the competition in Grozny.
The repeat MMA
champion went so far as to say the event was in bad taste. Children under 12 are not even allowed to watch MMA, he said.

The competition was just the latest example of questionable behavior by Kadyrov, who is notorious for running Chechnya as his personal fiefdom. Despite documented attacks on political opponents and unsympathetic journalists, Moscow has relied on Kadyrov to keep the once restive region under firm control. In recent years, though, he appears to have become more difficult for the Kremlin to manage.

When it comes to this latest outburst, Moscow seems unsure how to proceed. “I would recommend avoiding any association or making any parallels until it is determined who did it,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday. “Of course, when the attack is on the daughter of a friend, it is very disturbing,” he added.

Moscow authorities are investigating the assault, the TASS news agency reported on Wednesday evening. Evidence gathered so far in the media is, at best, circumstantial.

The Kommersant newspaper on Thursday reported that the attack took place on a street near Moscow's President Hotel, which anecdotally is considered to be the unofficial headquarters of Kadyrov's men in Moscow. But the head of Moscow police, Pavel Milovanov, said on Thursday that the man who assaulted Emelianenko's daughter was of Slavic, rather than Chechen, appearance.

What is clear is that Emelianenko touched a nerve in Chechnya. Following the critique of Kadyrov's underage fight club, Chechens close to Kadyrov and thousands of his Internet fans blasted Emelianenko with threats and insults. Writing online on Oct. 6, Kadyrov's cousin, Adam Delimkhanov, promised that the Russian fighter would “be held accountable for every work he uttered.”

Most of the drama, before Emelienenko's daughter was assaulted, took place on Instagram. On Oct. 7, a Chechen fighter by the name of Abdul-Kerim Edilov — known as “The Chechen Lion” — took to defending Kadyrov and attacking Emelianenko, claiming the Russian was an aging hack who was jealous that people were not paying attention to him.

Emelianenko is a true icon in the MMA community, and it was not long before a champion came to his aid: Ukrainian-Russian MMA fighter Nikita Krylov. In a lengthy Instagram post, Krylov challenged Edilov to a fight: “If people these days are not able to

speak to older generations with☒respect, this is 10,000 times worse than any children fighting."

"Let's resolve the☒issue as athletes and as men," Krylov's post continued. "I don't☒like what you wrote about what of the fighters I respect most, so☒let's meet in the spring and settle who engages in sport, and who☒writes things on Instagram." Edilov later accepted the☒challenge in another Instagram post, claiming he would be "unable to☒express his joy" if the two met in the ring.

Kadyrov, meanwhile, has said nothing about the attack on Emelianenko's daughter. Officials in Chechnya, including the fighting club's head and the representative of the Chechen Youth Union, have insisted that a Chechen man would never raise a hand against a child.

The last time Kadyrov mentioned Emelianenko on Instagram was Oct. 7, when he asked followers to cease and desist from further attacks on the MMA legend. "Mr. Emelianenko realized his mistake," Kadyrov wrote.

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