

Chechen Leader Calls Rumored Ban on Beards in Russian Army ‘Provocation’

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Members of Russia’s military and security services in Chechnya. **Yelena Afonina / TASS**

The head of the Russian republic of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov [reacted furiously](#) to comments made by State Duma Deputy Viktor Sobolev regarding the need to crack down on unkempt and unshaven soldiers in the Russian army on Wednesday, sparking a war of words between the two men.

Reports that Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine had been forced to shave their beards [surfaced](#) in pro-government Telegram channels earlier this week.

Even though the claims were quickly [disputed](#) by Denis Pushilin, a Russian separatist official in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic, as well as by the Abkhaz head of the “Pyatnashka” volunteer unit Akhra Avidzba, Sobolev went on to [defend](#) the measure in an interview with news outlet RBC published on Wednesday.

“This is a basic military discipline requirement,” RBC quoted Sobolev, who is a member of the Duma’s Defense Committee, as saying.

“A soldier is seen by civilians, he should look exemplary. If he walks ungroomed and unshaven, then this doesn’t compliment him either as a person or as a soldier,” the deputy added.

Sobolev’s remarks were quickly seized upon by Chechen leader Kadyrov, who immediately appeared to detect an attack on “volunteer” soldiers hailing from Chechnya and, consequently, Islamophobia in the Moscow politician’s words.

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“Sobolev knows perfectly well who wears a beard on the frontlines and why,” Kadyrov wrote on Telegram on Thursday.

“That’s why I’m quite certain that this is a provocation that looks to dampen the fighting spirit of soldiers who are fighting a holy war for the Almighty ... 99.9% of our team wear a beard, take care of it, wear it according to sunnah,” he added, referring to a lifestyle that follows the habits of the Prophet Muhammad.

Kadyrov added that Sobolev “must have a lot of free time,” in which to pour over Russian military regulations and advised the deputy, who holds the rank of lieutenant general in the Russian army, to either focus on generating new military strategies or “ship off to the frontlines.”

In response to Kadyrov’s criticism, Sobolev backtracked on his earlier remarks in a separate statement [published](#) by RBC.

Sobolev noted that he visited the Chechen regiment before and found that all of its soldiers looked “impeccable” and “well equipped.”

“Demanding them to shave their beards would be silly,” Sobolev added.

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