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'Elite' Chechen Fighters Tasked With Policing Occupied Nuclear City in Ukraine – Al Jazeera

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A fighter from the Chechen battalion Akhmat. **Alexander Reka / TASS**

An elite Chechen military unit has been deployed as a police force in the occupied Ukrainian nuclear city of Enerhodar, Al Jazeera reported Wednesday, citing interviews with engineers who fled the town and its remaining residents.

Russian forces captured Enerhodar, which hosts the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, in the early days of its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Al Jazeera reports that Akhmat, a special forces company loyal to Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, carries out police functions in Enerhodar in weeks-long shifts, patrolling the city in Russian-made UAZ "Patriot" SUVs.

The Chechen fighters, who make up one-fifth of the occupying forces in Enerhodar, enjoy a "higher status" and "do not mingle professionally or socially" with other Russian troops.

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"Chechens are always by themselves, they're the elite, a higher caste of sorts," said one of two anonymous engineers who fled Enerhodar in late May.

Akhmat troops reportedly search residents' smartphones to see if they have made donations to the Ukrainian military, ask about relatives serving in the Ukrainian armed forces, inspect cars and check their citizenship.

"If one has a Russian passport, everything is fine, good job, thanks, bye. If the passport is Ukrainian — everything has to be turned upside down" in the resident's home, said one of the engineers.

Al Jazeera notes that Akhmat troops do not appear to be involved in the decision-making process at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant or the torture of Enerhodar's residents.

Torture and interrogations in Enerhodar are "mostly" performed by Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) agents, National Guard officers of Slavic origin and collaborationist police officers, according to engineers who fled the city.

Enerhodar's remaining residents, estimated at less than half of the pre-war population of 51,000, mockingly call Akhmat "Ahmad Tea" in reference to a British tea brand popular in the Russian-speaking world, Al Jazeera reports.

Akhmat has been deployed in Enerhodar since at least January, the outlet said, citing a verified video obtained from a Ukrainian law enforcement agency and a state media report featuring the fighters.

At least one Akhmat soldier — a rare member of non-Chechen ethnicity — was alleged to be involved in the beating and castrating of a Ukrainian soldier last year. He denied involvement.

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