Chechnya's Kadyrov Urges Russia to Remove Syrian Rebel Group From Terrorist List

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Ramzan Kadyrov, the head of Russia's North Caucasus republic of Chechnya, urged Moscow on Monday to remove Syrian rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) from its list of terrorist and extremist organizations.

In a post on Telegram, Kadyrov called for Russia to remove HTS from its list of terrorist organizations, set up contact groups with HTS and resolve "humanitarian and medical issues" in Syria.

"To start positive processes, it is necessary to launch the procedure for excluding HTS and its representatives from the Russian list of terrorist organizations," the Chechen leader wrote.

On Dec. 8, after five decades of Assad family rule, HTS overthrew the regime of Bashar al-Assad. The former president has since fled to Russia, which supported Assad from the

beginning of the Syrian civil war and intervened militarily in 2015.

Kadyrov proposed that Russia "immediately organize the work of a contact group of the two countries, which will be able to build the first connections and begin to solve problems." He suggested that "Syrians who have lived and worked in the Chechen Republic for a long time could be involved in the work of the contact group."

HTS is also listed as a terrorist organization by the UN, U.S., EU, Britain and others. A senior UN official has said that the body would consider removing the terrorist designation if HTS formed a truly inclusive transitional government.

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"Any presence of Russia in Syria will pursue the goals of stability and security of the people," Kadyrov said. "Russian President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin has always pursued only one goal — to help the long–suffering Syrian people and protect them from any aggression."

Syria is home to a substantial Chechen population who emigrated there during the Chechen wars. After the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, as many as 4,000 Chechen militants traveled to Syria to fight Assad, although not all of them were Russian citizens.

Russia reportedly evacuated at least 400 soldiers from the Damascus region in recent days in coordination with the Islamist–led rebels that seized the capital, a member of HTS told the Financial Times in an interview.

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