



THE WARLORD IMAM

THE KREMLIN'S POSTER BOY FOR MODERATE ISLAM MAY BE RADICALIZING THE REGION.

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 PHOTOGRAFED BY ANDREW HARRIS

THE VIDEO SHOWS A 30-YEAR-old man in long skirts but without headscarves, the vehicle's occupants explaining. The two pedestrians scream, but they don't fall. A bit of red paintball ink is spreading across one young woman's blouse. As the vehicle pulls away, the camera shows the two women flailing for safety into the nearest shop.

Cherkyev's references of supposed Islamic property have struck again. In the case of combating terrorism, President Vladimir Putin has declared war on what he regards as public incitement. "My dream is for all our women to wear scarves, to associate with Islamic law," he told *RIA Novosti* recently. To assist in that fight and correct, supposedly, an Islamic misdeed, he established his own Taliban-style morality police, the Center for Spirituality and Moral Development and Education, last year. For his part, Cherkyev continues to give the streets in black cars and black cellphones, as the driver not only for unscarved hair but for short-skirted T-shirts, short skirts, and public displays of affection. Although many Cherkyev women have accused them of paintball attacks in the past few months, Kalyuzhnikov offers charges, blaming "somebody who wants to 'Islamize' my politics."

Kalyuzhnikov has become the standard bearer for the Kremlin's efforts to pacify the rebellious North Caucasus since and for all. His bare-knuckle style has brought at least some degree of law and order to Cherkyev, and that credit success is why the Kremlin trusts him. The region has resisted Moscow's control for centuries, but in the past decade or so, the violence has spread and intensity of an Islamic extremism has flourished elsewhere in the world. "Our Afghanistan is inside Russia," says Media Liaison of the Moscow Carnegie Center. Many kinds of violence died after Cherkyev rebels seized a Moscow theater in 2002 and a school in Beslan in 2004. This year, suicide bombers killed more than 40 people in the Moscow subway and more than 200 in a series of attacks in the North Caucasus. The brutal tactics of the Russian military and its local proxies have only fanned support for the rebels.

Now the country's leaders are trying a new approach. The idea is to substitute a different, more flexible strain of Islam among Russia's estimated 20 million professed Muslims. To that end, the Kremlin is spreading Islam online to open across new Islamic universities in Russia and sponsoring hundreds of students to pursue advanced degrees in approved universities in Syria and Saudi Arabia. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has moved to boost the authority of accredited imams, allowing that they have "a special place" in Caucasian society and calling on them to help the Kremlin "swell our forces through spirituality and high ethics of standards." At the same time, the military is continuing its efforts to hunt down and kill rebels and militants in the Caucasus.

At the same time, Kalyuzhnikov might seem like the perfect tool for the Kremlin's needs. Russian leader Vladimir Putin (Kalyuzhnikov calls him "my dad") appointed him president of Cherkyev in 2007, an area as he became old enough to take the post lightly. His brand of Islam is far from the hard-line Islam that Islamism espoused by many of the Cherkyev rebels—and by Osama bin Laden. Instead, it's an eclectic blend of Islam in traditionally secular, mystical branch of the Sunni sect and ancient Cherkyev traditions like the *shir*—an all-male hybrid of circle dance and prayer. His father, Ahmad Kalyuzhnikov, had been Cherkyev's chief spiritual leader when the

they eventually repudiated tried to break Russia's grip in the region, but he eventually reconciled with Moscow—and was assassinated in 2004. The teenage Kadyrov now casts himself as his father's spiritual and political heir, delivering long sermons to gatherings of religious students and scholars, wearing the traditional robes of a bull teacher, and professing fervently that he renounces his title of president in favor of *mullah al-Akher*, a Chechen term meaning "father of the nation," usually associated with the legendary imam who led the resistance to Russian occupation in the 19th century. In person, he prefers to be addressed as *Fadhul*, *Fadhul* the emperor.

Trust in the Kremlin's wishes, Kadyrov has set out to promulgate his own idiosyncratic version of Islamic law in place of the Wahhabi dictates of Moscow's adherents. Trouble is, it's not always easy to see much difference.

"Listen, we would like to remind you that every Muslim woman is obliged to wear a veil" says a widely distributed pamphlet issued by the Chechen state publishing house *Pat* ("The Path" in Russian, and a pun on "Patience"). "Today we mark you with paint—do not provoke us to use harsher methods!" He's passed millions into building mosques all over Chechnya, tightly restricted the

sale of alcohol, and made the wearing of Islamic attire compulsory in all Chechen schools and universities. The morality police act under his personal direction, according to the human-rights group Memorial, they punish suspected prostitutes by shaving their heads and eyebrows and painting their scalps green, the color of Islam. Kadyrov has also gone on record defending honor killings of "loose" women: "If a woman runs around, and if a man runs around with her, both of them are killed," he said last year. And his education policies strongly discourage access to the outside world's "corrupting" influences, such as the Internet.

Kadyrov's home life is a peculiar mix of bull party and the extravagant luxuries of an old-fashioned warlord. He often invites as many as a thousand legends at a time to his private compound (it boasts its own mosque, a zoo, and a park full of fountains) to dance the *shab* for as much as \$1 million at a stretch. And tears roll down his cheeks as he tells of the pilgrimage he made to Mecca this past July. He says Saudi King Abdullah gave Kadyrov and 17 companions special dispensation to enter Islam's holy of holies, the Kaaba—the sacred black cube at the heart of the city. Kadyrov says he was so overcome with "tearfulness" and "absolute happiness" that on his return he ordered 17 Chechen families to abandon their dwellings and blood feuds and formally accede to the name of Allah.

Kadyrov vigorously promotes his brand of Islam as an antidote to what he calls "the evil so-called democracy, Wahhabism." He's been lobbying the Kremlin

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ILLUSTRATION: ANDREW HAYES; PHOTO: ANDREW HAYES/REUTERS; PHOTO: ANDREW HAYES/REUTERS

to place all Russian and its under the supervision of Chechen leaders, who would draft a monthly session covering religious and political issues to be taught to all Russian citizens. "If people in Russia do not take the path of traditional, pure Islam, Russia will lose us," says Kadyrov. "All the other denominations, like Wahhabism, are not inventions for our country — we have never had it, and we will never accept it." But the architect of the Kremlin's new approach to Islam, a now-Moscow academic named Yuri Fedotkin, warns that endorsing Kadyrov's Islam or any other form of Islam about the others would be a horrendous mistake, sure to provoke a holy war between the sects.

Meanwhile, Moscow pursues its same old brutal policies in the region, substituting its own efforts to encourage peace and harmony. Well-meaning Kremlin-funded scholars like Oleg Khimukov, deputy director of the Foundation

to Support Islamic Culture and Education, may recruit Sharia legal specialists from Islamic universities in Qatar, Egypt, Oman, and Malaysia in the name of winning Russian Muslims away from extremism. But in Chechnya and its neighboring republics there's a real warzone of bad blood from so many years of relentless oppression. "Villages' homes continue to be burned, although now it's done by Chechen militias rather than by Russian soldiers. And mistreatment is mostly in practically universal. "Every arrest, every criminal case opened in North Caucasus, involves torture, abuse, beatings in detention," says Oleg Orlov, Moscow director of the rights group Memorial.



TEARS ROLL DOWN HIS CHEEKS AS HE TELLS OF THE PILGRIMAGE HE MADE TO MECCA THIS JULY.

MEMBERS OF THE CHECHEN-ISLAMIC MEET TOWARD MECCA AFTER A 50-DAY WINTER

Uy in the mountains, no more than a few miles from the busy bazaar of Patis Prospect, the rebellion continues. Several dozen insurgents attacked Kadyrov's family village of Tsvetnoy in late August, torching cars and houses and killing seven police officers who were serving as his personal security guards. Kadyrov personally led a retaliatory raid a few days later, but the rebels got away; he has promised a \$2 million reward for information leading to the commanders of the assault. Just outside Chechnya's borders, entire villages in neighboring Dagestan have been emptied of young men who have

led to join the rebels in the mountains rather than risk being killed by Kremlin-backed death squads.

Russian authorities do their best to suppress the almost-daily reports of clashes and bombings in the region. It's possible that Kadyrov's version of Islam, combined with a continued heavy reliance on extrajudicial disappearances and torture, may provide the Kremlin with a temporary means to curb the ethnic nationalism of the Caucasus rebels. But the cause of long-term peace may be ill served if those efforts only radicalize Russia's Muslims. Kadyrov, for his part, seems confident. "As long as Putin backs me up, I can do everything," he says. "Allah akbar!" ☐