



FPI Bulletin: Violent Threats to the Russian Democracy Movement

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On January 31, Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen strongman, [posted](#) a video clip on Instagram showing Mikhail Kasyanov, a leader of the Russian democracy movement, and his deputy [Vladimir Kara-Murza](#) within the cross hairs of a rifle sight. The video was filmed at the European Parliament in Strasbourg where they had gone the previous week to urge an independent investigation into the [assassination](#) of their colleague Boris Nemtsov last February. Five Chechen men have been arrested for Nemtsov's murder. One of the men has links to Kadyrov. The [caption](#) beneath Kadyrov's post read "Whoever didn't get it will get it now!"

Kadyrov's Instagram post is the most dramatic of the threats he has recently directed toward critics of the Putin regime. Last month, he [called](#) Russia's democratic opposition "enemies of the people and traitors." Appointed by Putin, Kadyrov has ruled Chechnya ruthlessly for almost a decade. The degree to which Kadyrov coordinates his actions with Putin is uncertain, but Kadyrov stresses that he is Putin's man. "We will gladly fulfill any order, in any spot in the world where our President tells us to go," Kadyrov told a [rally](#) of armed supporters in the Chechen capital Grozny in December 2014. "We will not disappoint him."

So far, the Kremlin has not spoken out against Kadyrov's threats. On Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov [said](#), "we do not follow Kadyrov's Instagram." Kasyanov, a former prime minister, [told](#) the BBC that Putin's failure to do so signaled "silent encouragement."

The U.S. hasn't spoken up yet either, although some of its allies have. The EU ambassador to Moscow, Vygaudas Usackas, [denounced](#) the "disgusting, overt murder threats" and called Kasyanov on the phone to offer support. France and Great Britain have also made statements.

Kadyrov's [ludicrous stunts](#) with animals, his thuggish flaunting of power and vile attacks on Russia's democracy movement can numb observers to the gravity of his threats. The history of violence against Putin's critics shows that such threats, along with Putin's tacit approval, must be taken seriously.

Statements of concern by foreign governments are, by themselves, an insufficient response. However it is unlikely that democracies will do anything else without making them first. Kadyrov and Putin know that. So do Russia's courageous democrats. The U.S. should condemn Kadyrov's threats against Russia's opposition and work with its allies to make democracy and human rights a higher priority.

For their parts, Kasyanov, Kara-Murza and their fellow democrats are carrying on with their efforts to contest elections and offer an alternative to Putin. They have no illusion about their short-term electoral prospects given the Kremlin's manipulation of the system, monopoly on television, prosecutions and intimidation of the opposition and civil society. Nevertheless, they wish to advance their vision of a democratic Russia based on universal values. Kasyanov, Kara-Murza and their colleagues insist that Russians have responsibility for the future of their country. They

ask only that Americans and Europeans to remain true to our principles, since we undermine them when we don't.