

**RUSSIA: UNCONFIRMED REPORTS ABOUT THE  
DEATH OF DOKU UMAROV SEVERAL WEEKS AHEAD  
OF WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES IN SOCHI**

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A video, posted on Youtube and on numerous jihadist websites on Thursday, triggered a wave of rumors about alleged death of the leader of Imarat Kavkaz, Doku Umarov aka Emir Abu Usman.

A 16-minutes audio statement illustrated by a photo of Doku Umarov is voiced by an unknown man, who announces the death of Umarov, and claims that the circumstances of the death are not clear yet. The man also says that Umarov has not left a 'naib' - i.e. successor, so Imarat Kavkaz should designate a new leader.

Authenticity of the video and credibility of the claim can not been ascertained yet. Some sources claim that this statement was allegedly made by emir of Imarat Kavkaz Abu Mohammad and it was addressed to the representative of Umarov in Turkey Abdul Aziz. The statement was allegedly recovered from a USB flash drive seized from the body of a Dagestani terrorist, killed in the beginning of December in clashes with Kurdish fighters in Syria.

Comments to the video also reveal that four key emirs of Imarat Kavkaz know about the death of Doku Umarov that allegedly took place several weeks ago but prefer not

to reveal this information to avoid new fighting for power within the terrorist network.

Media arm of Imarat Kavkaz, Kavkazcenter, so far denied information about the death of Doku Umarov.

It should be mentioned that since December 2013 the president of Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov has been claiming repeatedly that the terrorist leader is dead. The latest claim was made by Kadyrov on January 16 on his Instagram account where Kadyrov stated that Doku Umarov was killed during a counter-terrorism operation in the beginning of January. Meanwhile so far Russian security agencies can not confirm Umarov's death. Interfax news agency also quoted Kadyrov as saying that Umarov's body has not been found yet.

To recall, unconfirmed reports about the death of Doku Umarov appeared in Russian media at least 7 times in the past. The latest report about Umarov's death was made following counter-terrorism operation in Ingushetia on March 28, 2011, when 19 terrorists including several close associates of Umarov were killed. Several days after the death of the key Russian terrorist leader was announced by security authorities, Umarov called to the Chechen branch of Radio Free Europe and confirmed that he was alive.

### **And if Umarov is really dead?**

The death of Doku Umarov, if confirmed, will be presented by Russian security forces as the biggest security achievement ahead of the Winter Olympics. Indeed, without Doku Umarov and in the absence of his legitimate successors Imarat Kavkaz will be de-facto beheaded.

Indeed, the statement in Youtube confirms that Doku Umarov has not appointed any successors, so announcement of his death will inevitably trigger new internal fighting for power between the key emirs of Imarat Kavkaz. **This situation of competition is likely to trigger an increase of terrorist attacks, each "candidate" trying to demonstrate he stronger and more determinate than the others.**

To recall, similar situation was observed in July 2010 when four emirs of Imarat Kavkaz, Khusein Gakaev, Tarkhan Gaziev, Aslanbek Vadalov and Arab mercenary emir Mukhannad renounced their loyalty to Doku Umarov, criticizing his decision to abandon the idea of fighting for independence of Chechen republic to promote the extension of Imarat Kavkaz on all Russian territory. The rebel emirs appointed Khussein Gakaev as the head of Chechnya and the head of their new terrorist network. The split caused a deep crisis within the leadership of Imarat Kavkaz that finished only one year later when Gakaev renewed his pledge of loyalty to Umarov and re-joined Imarat Kavkaz.

After the death of Sheikh Abu Supiyan (Supiyan Abdullaev) - Umarov's closest associate in a counter-terrorism raid on March 22, 2011, the death of Emir Mukhannad, and Khussein Gakaev in 2012, the pool of potential successors of Umarov reduced significantly leaving Aslanbek Vadalov almost the only candidate for the leadership of Imarat Kavkaz.

Meanwhile comments and statements of senior members of Imarat Kavkaz posted online over the last months highlight that some senior members of the terrorist network do not agree with the candidature of Vadalov. In this situation the death of Doku Umarov inevitably intensifies fight for the leadership of Imarat Kavkaz and provoke a new split within the terrorist network.

It should be pointed out, that Doku Umarov who remains the head of Imarat Kavkaz over the last 6 years is the only compromise person in the leadership of Imarat Kavkaz, accepted both by local islamist elders of Chechnya, Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria, young generation of islamist terrorists and international terrorist structures that provides financial support to Northern Caucasian terrorists.

Doku Umarov was born in 1964 in the Chechen village of Kharsenoi. He was the last president of self-proclaimed Independent Republic of Ichkeria (Chechnya) in 2006 – 2007. In October 2007 Doku Umarov established “Imarat Kavkaz” (Islamic state in Norther Caucasus) that was officially declared as terrorist organization by Russian state authorities.

As ESISC numerous times reported earlier, with the establishment of Imarat Kavkaz the ideology and methods of Islamist terrorists of Northern Caucasus have changed significantly. If in the beginning of 1990s, under leadership of Dzhokhar Dudaev, the key goal of terrorists was “liberation of Chechen people and autonomy of Chechen republic Ichkeria”, Imarat Kavkaz renounced from separatist ideology and called for jihad against all “infidels” and enemies of Islam, extending the field of fighting to all the territory of Russian Federation.

Under the rule of Doku Umarov, terrorist structures of Northern Caucasus started massive recruiting campaign, targeting vulnerable categories of population, namely prisoners, illegal migrants and orphans.

Doku Umarov personally claimed responsibility in video-statements for the most violent terrorist attacks including the blast in Nevskiy Express train on 27 of November 2009, Moscow subway blasts on March 29, 2010 and Domodedovo airport suicide bombing on January 24, 2011.

On June 23, 2010 the United States designated Doku Umarov a global terrorist. On May 26, 2011, the bounty of 5 million USD was announced for the information about the location of Umarov.

In June 2013 Doku Umarov issued a video statement where he urged to stage attack ahead and during 2014 Sochi Olympic Games and use “all possible means” not to allow the Games to take place. In the statement Umarov cancels his earlier call from February 2012 for a truce and declarations that jihadists should not attack civilian targets, saying that it was interpreted by governmental authorities as a sign of weakness and provoked intensification of security operations in Northern Caucasus.

So far it was the only clear call of Russian terrorist groups to target Sochi Olympic Games 2014. The statement provoked numerous claims of support from the radical islamist commenters in social networks and internet-forums.

It also should be mentioned that no statements or claims of responsibility from Doku Umarov and Imarat Kavkaz for the deadly blasts in Volgograd on October 21, December 29 and December 30, 2013, have been made so far. Meanwhile most of

security experts attribute these attacks to Imarat Kavkaz and directly link it to the latest statement of Doku Umarov.

It seems indeed strange that Umarov appeared for the last time on the video in July 2013 when he issued a video threatening of attacks during and ahead of Sochi Olympic Games. Since that no further messages (video, audio or in text form) were posted in the Internet. On the contrary, media arm of Imarat Kavkaz posted online several old videos of Umarov, that have been allegedly recorded in the beginning of 2013 and have not contained any particular threats.

Hence, despite the fact that the death of the Doku Umarov has not been confirmed by official sources or by Imarat Kavkaz, increasing number of media speculations on his death aim to improve the security image of Russia ahead of Winter Olympic Games and to prove that security forces are able to tackle terrorism threat.

According to rhetoric of Ramzan Kadyrov, after the death of Doku Umarov Islamist terrorists of Northern Caucasus are too busy trying to find a new leader of Imarat Kavkaz to pose any threat to the Olympic games. Meanwhile this declaration does not seem credible, as previous period of disagreement within the leadership of Imarat Kavkaz several years ago was followed by series of deadly attacks, perpetrated by rival groups of terrorists in attempts to raise his publicity and create reputation that would allow to receive financial support from international terrorist networks.

At the same time string of deadly bombings perpetrated in Volgograd and Pyatigorsk in the end of 2013 highlights that in recent years Islamist terrorists largely infiltrated beyond the borders of Chechnya and Dagestan where they established terrorist cells that are able to act independently. It also proves that despite optimistic claims of federal authorities, real capacities of security and intelligence forces to trace Islamist terrorists across Russia and to prevent new terrorist attacks remain relatively limited and the risk of new large-scale bomb attacks is high.