

Son of Chechen Warlord Dies Fighting Assad

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The Syrian city of Homs after government shelling in April 2012.

The son of a prominent Chechen warlord was killed in Syria while battling President Bashar Assad's troops, according to reports on three Russian-language websites linked to Islamist rebels.

Rustam Gelayev, 24, was killed during an artillery attack in Aleppo between Aug. 11 and 13, the sites said. His body was taken to Chechnya, where he was buried Aug. 17.

Gelayev was identified as the eldest son of Ruslan Gelayev, who rose to fame during the second Chechen war and was killed in 2004 during a clash with border guards close to Georgia in Dagestan.

Rustam Gelayev was born in Omsk, where his father lived during the 1980s and married a local woman named Larisa Gubkina, according to an NTV report in 2003 that was [republished](#)

on the website of the Memorial human rights organization.

After living in Chechnya, Rustam moved to an unspecified Middle Eastern country to study Islam, the rebel websites reported. He joined the anti-Assad forces in Syria earlier this summer.

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has in the past vehemently denied reports about Chechen fighters in Syria, calling them "fabrications" to discredit Moscow's stance on the conflict.

The Kremlin has defied Western criticism by backing Assad in the bloody uprising that has left more than 15,000 dead since last year.

Foreign correspondents have claimed to have spotted Chechens among the insurgents, although they have not provided much proof so far. The latest instance was a tweet from the Guardian's Martin Chulov on Monday, who said he saw Chechens in an Aleppo village, en route to the frontline.

"Chechens [are] open about where they were from," he [said](#).

Syria also has a population of perhaps 5,000 ethnic Chechens, who are descended from refugees who immigrated to the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century.

Kadyrov's spokesman, Alvi Karimov, said Wednesday that "no inhabitants of Chechnya" are among the participants of the conflict, Interfax reported.

But he seemingly did not rule out the presence of individual fighters by saying "the so-called armed opposition in Syria, lavishly supported by Western countries with arms and money, buys politicians and generals, but single volunteers can't affect the climate."

Moscow believes that Syria has no intention of using its chemical weapons and is able to keep them safe, Kommersant reported Wednesday, citing an unspecified Foreign Ministry official.

A "confidential dialogue" with the government in Damascus on the security of the arsenal has convinced Russia that "the Syrian authorities do not intend to use these weapons and are capable of keeping them under control," the report said.

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