

United Russia Taps Kadyrov, 2 Others

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The United Russia party [nominated](#) incumbent Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov for a second four-year term at the helm of the once war-ravaged North Caucasus republic — along with two other candidates.

Grozny Mayor Muslim Khuchiyev and Shaid Zhamaldayev, head of the region surrounding the Chechen capital, were also tapped as possible republican leaders by the party, which submitted the list to President Dmitry Medvedev on Saturday.

Medvedev, who may now pick a name from it or choose an alternative for confirmation by the local legislature, did not name the candidate he preferred over the weekend.

But analysts said Friday that Khuchiyev and Zhamaldayev were only on the list so that it contains the required three names and that any choice other than Kadyrov was out of the question.

"As long as Kadyrov lives, there will be no alternative to him," said Maxim Agarkov,

a Caucasus analyst with the SK-Strategia think tank.

Kadyrov, whose first term expires in April, has ruled Chechnya with an iron grip since 2007, when he assumed the presidency at the age of 30.

Human rights groups say that, under his rule, all dissent and opposition has been crushed, while opposition activists have criticized the federal government for effectively ceding all power in Chechnya to Kadyrov.

But Kadyrov's claim of being indispensable to the Kremlin rests on his ability to control the violence in his republic, said Alexei Malashenko of the Carnegie Moscow Center.

"As long as he controls all armed formations in the republic, he can carry on his rule," he said.

Kadyrov's strength was challenged last year when rebels staged two high-profile attacks in the republic.

In August, a shootout in his home village of Tsentoroi killed 19 people, including five civilians.

Two months later, in October, three attackers managed to get inside the Chechen parliament and blew themselves up, killing three other people.

Suicide bombers have also returned to the streets of Grozny, with the latest instance reported last Tuesday, when two suicide bombers blew themselves up in a downtown apartment block as police tried to arrest them.

Kadyrov's second term will also be the first in which he will no longer officially bear the title president. He announced to change his title to "head" last fall after arguing that the country should only have one president.

The move was copied by most others of the North Caucasus leaders while being met with opposition in Tatarstan.

Malashenko said that much of Kadyrov's future reign depends on who governs the Kremlin.

"If Medvedev stays, he will have to build better ties with him," Malashenko said of the Chechen leader.

While appearing loyal to Medvedev, Kadyrov has in the past reserved his highest praise for Putin, calling him the man he loves and naming a main street in Grozny after him.

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