
ISIS SAYS SENIOR COMMANDER "OMAR THE CHECHEN" WAS KILLED IN IRAQ

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An Islamic State of Iraq and Syria-run media outlet says Omar al-Shishani, one of the group's top military commanders, has been killed in fighting near the Iraqi city of Mosul.

U.S. and Iraqi officials, as well as Syrian activists, said in March that al-Shishani, who was in his 30s and known as "Omar the Chechen," had died of wounds sustained in a U.S. airstrike in Syria.

But the ISIS-run Amaq news agency reported Wednesday that al-Shishani was "martyred" in the town of al-Shirqat, near Mosul, while helping to "halt the military campaign" against the ISIS-held city. ISIS supporters published eulogies to al-Shishani on social media and messaging networks.

Amaq had denied that al-Shishani was killed in March, without providing evidence that he was alive.

It was not immediately possible to reconcile the conflicting reports.

Al-Shishani, whose real name was Tarkhan Batirashvili, was described as the ISIS equivalent of a secretary of defense. He was an ethnic Chechen from the former Soviet Republic of Georgia.

The U.S. government had a longstanding \$5 million bounty for information leading to his being brought to justice.

The Pentagon has said the ISIS leader held numerous senior military positions within the group, including "minister of war," and was based in Raqqa, Syria.

Al-Shishani was one of hundreds of Chechens who have been among the toughest jihadi fighters in Syria. He was from the Pankisi Valley, a center of Georgia's Chechen community and once a stronghold for militants.

In March, Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook described him as a "battle-tested leader" with experience in numerous clashes in Iraq and Syria. He said that his loss would hurt ISIS' ability to recruit foreign fighters, especially those from Chechnya and the Caucasus region.

Kaynak/Source: