

US-trained Chechen ISIS Commander Abu Omar al-Shishani Survives US Assassination Strike

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Celebrations of the death of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria commander Abu Omar al-Shishani were premature, US media acknowledged late this week. The ISIS leader, whose death at the hands of a US airstrike was touted by US outlets and officials on Wednesday, is wounded but alive, according to reports Friday.

Assassinations and failed assassinations by the American military and intelligence bureaucracies are a daily reality of the “Global War on Terror.”

The attempted killing of Shishani, however, has a broader significance that sheds light on the war on terror and the massive lies which sustain it. The story of Shishani, a Georgian fighter born as Tarkhan Tayumurazovich Batirashvili in an ethnic Chechen community in Georgia’s Pankisi Valley, is significant for its exposure of the organic ties between US imperialism and its nominal enemies in ISIS, al Qaeda, and myriad similar groups.

Shishani began his career as a professional soldier in the Georgian national military, where he trained under the direct supervision of US Special Forces commandos.

During training Shishani gained a reputation as the “star pupil” of the US-managed warfare training.

“The only reason he didn’t go to Iraq to fight alongside America was that we needed his skills here in Georgia,” a Georgian military officer told McClatchy.

“We trained him well, and we had lots of help from America,” the officer said.

The future ISIS leader gave no sign of disloyalty to the US-dominated Georgian force. While fighting in the 2008 Georgia-Russian war, Shishani deployed ahead of the the front lines, calling in strikes against Russian columns from forward operating posts.

According to the Georgian military, Shishani’s official military career ended when he was discharged in 2010, because of his hospitalization for tuberculosis. Later the same year, he was arrested on charges of illegally stockpiling weapons, according to Georgian officials.

Shishani was subsequently released prior to completing his full sentence, fleeing Georgia in early 2012 for the battlefields of Syria.

According to the BBC, the US Special Forces’ top student rapidly became one of the “most influential” leaders within the Islamist militias fighting in Syria.

By late 2012, Shishani had taken command of Jaysh al-Muhajireen Brigade, a Chechen militia linked to the US-backed al Nusra Front, commanding the group as it waged joint operations with al Nusra around Aleppo.

In May 2013, ISIS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi appointed Shishani as commander of all ISIS operations in northern Syria, including forces deployed around Idlib, Aleppo, Latakia and Raqqa. In 2014, Shishani again moved up the ISIS chain of command, managing the creation of a financial architecture for new ISIS bases including in Minbij, Syria.

The Chechen militant's lightning rise to the highest levels of the ISIS apparatus, just years after learning his trade under the supervision of elite US troops, provides a stark illustration of the undeniable links between the US military and intelligence apparatus and the very terrorist groups against which the Pentagon is supposedly waging war.

Shishani emerged out of military that is among the most heavily dependent on US aid worldwide. Georgia's armed forces rely on US funds for nearly 50 percent of their annual budget, according to a new report by the Washington-based Security Assistance Monitor.

Like Shishani, the great majority of ISIS fighters are drawn from countries whose governments have close ties to the US and Western militaries, ISIS documents leaked this week show.

The ethnic and national composition of ISIS alone makes clear the group's integration into the global military network of US imperialism. The vast majority of ISIS personnel have been drawn from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, and Tunisia. ISIS' ranks are dominated by gunmen drawn from countries with ultra-reactionary regimes with close ties to Washington, the documents show.

The documents also give a glimpse of the inner workings of an Islamic State that, despite its bloody propaganda stunts, is essentially a professionalized military and political organization no different from other bourgeois armies and parties.

ISIS is systematically recruiting, vetting and monitoring members, and is especially interested to attract more educated and skilled elements. The ISIS documents show that applicants are even asked to submit recommendations from previous employers.

The group's potential role as an instrument of the US military drive against Russia becomes ever more obvious. New ISIS affiliates are emerging in a host of countries with crucial importance to the US. The ISIS network is expanding along Russia's southern frontier, with special focus on the most geopolitically explosive areas of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

At least 40 terrorist financial cells are already operating on Russian soil, supported by another 30 cells targeting Russia from abroad, Russian intelligence officials announced Friday. Russian intelligence agents identified more than 1,500 terrorists and 3,500 bank accounts linked to terror groups plotting attacks against Russia. A single French-based cell is managing more than 1,000 sleeper agents operating on Russian territory, the officials claimed.

On Tuesday, militants claiming to represent a newly formed "Caucasus Province" of the Islamic State released a video recording, threatening attacks against Russia and suggesting various tactics for use against Russian targets.

The tape begins with footage of a car bombing in southern Russia's Dagestan province, where US intelligence has long sought to cultivate Islamist forces for operations aimed at destabilizing Russia.

The same pattern is evident within Russia's other "soft underbelly" in Central Asia. Recent years have seen ISIS burst onto the political scene in Uzbekistan. Last spring, Tajikistan's top counterterrorism officer, Gumurod Halimov, defected to the ISIS banner.

In April, Halimov disappeared suddenly from his command of the Tajik security apparatus, reappearing a month later as the star of an ISIS propaganda film. Posing in front of the black flag, Halimov denounced the US while boasting of his training by US commandos and Blackwater mercenaries.

Like Shishani, Halimov benefited from cutting-edge military training provided by the US government. Before defecting, Halimov completed no less than five training courses run by the US military, including repeated trips to the US for training.

Along with Georgia, Tajikistan is also among the most US-dependent militaries, receiving nearly 30 percent of its 2014 military budget from Washington, according to the Security Assistance Monitor study.

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