

Prosecutors Suspect Chechen of Fighting Alongside Syrian Rebels

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A supporter of Egyptian Salafi presidential candidate, Hazem Abu Ismail, waves the Syrian opposition flag as they gather in Tahrir Square in Cairo April 6, 2012. **Freedom House**

Chechen prosecutors have opened a criminal case against a Russian suspected of having joined Syrian rebels in the fight against President Bashar Assad's regime.

Shakhid Temirbulatov, born in Chechnya, joined the Syrian opposition forces in July, 2013, and is now "actively participating" in the ongoing civil war, the prosecutor's office said in a statement on Thursday.

Temirbulatov is accused of "participating in an armed formation on the territory of a foreign state with goals that contradict the interests of the Russian Federation," the statement said. The charge carries a sentence of up to six years in prison, though the Criminal Code states that people who voluntarily lay down arms are exempt from prosecution.

President Vladimir Putin, whose government is a major supporter of Assad on the U.N. Security Council, said in his op-ed published in The New York Times in September that "hundreds of militants from Western countries and even Russia" who are fighting on the side of the opposition in Syria are an issue of "deep concern" for Moscow.

Federal Security Service deputy head Sergei Smirnov said last September that around 300-400 Russians are fighting in Syria against Assad's forces.

Two natives of the North Caucasus were detained last year for supposed involvement with Syria's opposition, RIA Novosti reported.

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