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Infamous 'Chechen' Warlord in Syria Is Really From Georgia, Report Says

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Jihadist commander Omar al-Shishani is reportedly from Georgia and was formerly known as Tarkhan Batirashvili.

An infamous jihadist warlord fighting in the Middle East and known as "Omar the Chechen" actually hails from the Christian nation of Georgia, a news report said Friday.

The red-bearded Omar al Shishani, which translates as Omar the Chechen, has become one of the most recognizable faces of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS — an al-Qaida splinter group that controls part of Iraqi and Syrian territory.

Yet the rebel fighter — identified as Tarkhan Batirashvili — does not hail from Chechnya at all, but the Pankisi Gorge in northern Georgia, the man who claims to be his father, Timur, told Sky News on Friday. The gorge was used as a base by Chechen Islamist militants during their 15-year-long standoff with Russia.

According to the elder Batirashvili, his son had always wanted to be a soldier, joining the army and fighting for Georgia in its 2008 war with Russia. However, a bout of tuberculosis led to his

discharge from the service on medical grounds, leaving Batirashvill Jr. devastated and "tormented," his father told Sky News.

The younger Batirashvill then spent several months in jail for his involvement in the illegal arms trade, coming back angry and promising to start a "holy war for God," before traveling to Syria where he surfaced last year under his current nom de guerre.

The ISIS, which has earned a fearsome reputation for its brutality in the ongoing Syrian war, made major gains in Iraq last month and proclaimed the founding of a "caliphate," or Islamic state, in the territories it controls.

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