

U.S. Blacklists Chechen Fighters in Syria Tied to Islamic State

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More than 200,000 have fled from Syria to Turkey over the past five days, seeking refuge from the Islamic State.

The U.S. government has blacklisted several fighters from Russia's North Caucasus and a Chechen-led militant group fighting in Syria over their alleged ties to radical militant organization the Islamic State.

The Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar group has "launched deadly assaults against civilian communities and kidnapped civilians and other foreigners in Syria" since its formation in February 2013, the U.S. State Department announced Wednesday.

On social networking sites, the hard-line Islamist group has frequently gone by the less formal name of the "Army of Immigrants and Supporters" for its composition of foreign fighters, many of them from Russia's North Caucasus. Analysts have estimated that the group has about 15,000 fighters, though it is unclear how many of them are from Russia or

the former Soviet republics.

The U.S. State Department has imposed sanctions against the group for "cooperating with other violent extremist organizations in Syria, including al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant," according to Wednesday's statement.

The State Department also included several other foreign-led groups on its sanctions list, as well as individuals said to be training militants, including Georgia native Murad Margoshvili, who is accused of having "built a terrorist training base in Syria near the Turkish border, where newly arrived foreign fighters received combat training."

Separately, the U.S. Treasury has also sanctioned several individuals and entities said to be involved in the Syrian conflict, including the now infamous red-bearded Georgian fighter Umar al-Shishani, whose real name is Tarkhan Batirashvili. He formerly led JAMWA, before moving to the upper echelons of the Islamic State.

JAMWA has been vocal in its threats to Russia. The group's deputy commander — Abdul Karim Krymsky, a Crimean Tatar — has repeatedly called on Muslims in Ukraine and Russia's recently annexed territory of Crimea to rise up and wage war against Russia. In May, he published a video on a pro-jihadist website in which he called Russia's annexation of Crimea a "humiliation" for Muslims and urged Crimean Tatars to wage jihad in Ukraine or Russia if they could not go to Syria to fight.

Saying that Russians would only respond to "the language of force," Krymsky warned that there would be another mass deportation of Crimean Tatars similar to that ordered by Soviet leader Josef Stalin in 1944. He urged Crimean Tatars and Muslims in general "not to let history repeat itself" and to resist discrimination and harassment by the "infidels" in Crimea.

Russia has so far not issued any blacklists of its own or moved to impose sanctions on jihadist fighters in Syria, though fighters returning to Russia's North Caucasus from Syria have regularly been detained and charged.

On Tuesday, Grozny native Tamazi Mutoshvili was detained for having fought alongside rebels in Syria throughout 2013, according to the online news site Caucasian Knot. He faces up to 10 years in prison.

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