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Kadyrov's 'Killed' Islamic State Militant Very Much Alive, Report Says

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Islamic State commander Omar al-Shishani, born Tarkhan Batirashvili.

Islamic State commander Omar al-Shishani is very much alive, despite claims by Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov that the red-bearded militant was killed last week, a Georgian newspaper cited residents of his native Pankisi Gorge as saying.

Referring to al-Shishani by his his birth name, respected Pankisi Gorge elder Khaso Khangoshvili said: "The guys [from Pankisi] called, everything is okay with Tarkhan [Batirashvili]," Russia's Vzglyad newspaper reported Monday.

Khangoshvili's comments were first published by Georgian newspaper Rezonansi and republished in Russian by Vzglyad.

Khangoshvili also said Batirashvili's relatives would have been informed if he had been injured. Batirashvili's father, a Christian, still lives in Pankisi Gorge, though the two reportedly have not been in touch since the militant lashed out at his father because of their religious differences.

Another resident, Ayuf Borchasvili, was cited as saying that other men from Georgia's Pankisi Gorge — once considered a hotbed of Islamic extremist activity by Russia's security services — had spoken to Batirashvili by phone and confirmed that he was still alive.

Last week, Kadyrov said Batirashvili had been killed while fighting, though many bloggers immediately debunked the claim, pointing out the photo that the hardman leader used as proof had been published a year earlier.

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