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Russian Man Sentenced to Life in U.S. Prison for Taliban Attack

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His capture on the battlefield raised questions about his legal status.

A former Soviet tank commander who was convicted of leading a terror attack on U.S. forces in Afghanistan was sentenced Thursday to life in prison by a court in Richmond, Virginia, The Associated Press reported.

Irek Hamidullin, who U.S. officials said had joined the Haqqani Network, a Taliban-affiliated militant group, after the Soviet-Afghan war, was found guilty in August of 15 terror-related charges.

His capture on the battlefield raised questions about his legal status, with his attorney Robert Wagner arguing that his client had committed a "lawful act of war."

"You accuse me of terrorism. That is a lie. I am doing what Jesus Christ told us to do," Hamidullin was quoted as saying during a court hearing, AP reported.

He went on to criticize the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and accused the government of

targeting him “in order to send a message to the Russians.”

The case ultimately moved forward in a civilian court, with the judge arguing that Hamidullin wasn't a lawful combatant as the Taliban and its affiliated groups “did not adhere to the laws and customs of war.”

Hamidullin led three groups of militants in a 2009 attack on Afghan border police in Khost province.

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