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Russia's FSB Sent Ex-Islamic State Fighters to Infiltrate Ukraine, Turkey, U.S. – Meduza

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Islamic State militants in Khorasan province. **Hatab Khurasani (CC BY 4.0)**

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) has recruited former Islamic State fighters to infiltrate Ukraine, Turkey and the United States, the independent Meduza news website reported Tuesday, citing four recruited fighters.

The outlet said an unnamed source close to the FSB confirmed regular but largely unsuccessful attempts to penetrate Ukraine's military circles.

Meduza interviewed a former Russian Islamic State fighter who had served a four-year prison sentence out of a maximum of 20 years in exchange for agreeing to work for the FSB in Ukraine.

The fighter, Baurzhan Kultanov, said the FSB ended up sending him to Turkey in the spring of 2022, where he said he was ordered to gather information about underground efforts to send

fighters to Ukraine.

In Ukraine, the FSB reportedly targeted the head of a volunteer battalion fighting on the side of Ukraine since 2014 that has Crimean Tatars and Chechens in its ranks.

“You’re our eyes and ears there, but you’re not the only one,” Kultanov recalled the FSB recruiters as saying to him.

“It would be nice to make you a double and even triple agent so that other special services would want to recruit you,” they continued.

“You don’t have to invent anything…You’re really a terrorist and a Muslim who did time here. Just tell them you don’t like Russia and the FSB and want to help. They’ll take you in with open arms,” Kultanov recalled the officer, Alexander Gushin, as saying.

Ukraine said in January 2023 that it had exposed more than 600 Russian agents.

Kultanov is currently jailed in Turkey on charges of violating immigration rules. Meduza said he had asked for political asylum on claims that he would be jailed and killed if deported to Russia.

Meduza cited another ex-ISIS fighter who had allegedly fought alongside Kultanov in Syria, identified as Karim from Russia’s republic of Dagestan, as saying that Russia’s recruitment efforts in Ukraine are an open secret.

“That’s why no one trusts each other” among the Russian Muslim diaspora, Karim was quoted as saying.

U.S. authorities have detained around 50 Russians suspected of being FSB agents at the U.S.-Mexico border since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Meduza cited terrorism researcher Vera Mironova as saying.

“Most of them say ‘I’m an activist or an NGO worker or a journalist. I attended protests and now I’m being persecuted. Let me in’,” Mironova said, citing unnamed Department of Homeland Security contacts.

Some turn themselves in to U.S. border patrol as disaffected FSB agents sent to spy on Russian opposition activists and journalists, Mironova added.

Meduza said an unnamed Russian activist recalled attending a 2020 Kremlin meeting with Timur Prokopenko, a senior official in charge of domestic policy, in which plans to send the “fake activists” to the U.S. were discussed.

The FSB, Ukraine’s security service SBU and the Kremlin did not respond to Meduza's requests for comment.

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