

Feeling Like 'Idiots,' 4 Bikers Flying Back Home From Iraq

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The detained bikers have reportedly been beaten and might face espionage charges. Above, a biker on his motorcycle in Moscow. **Denis Grishkin**

Four Russian bikers jailed for five days after entering Iraq with fake visas were to arrive in Moscow late Monday — without their motorcycles but grateful for freedom despite, as one of them said, their “stupidity.”

The bikers — Oleg Kapkayev, Alexander Vardanyants, Oleg Maximov and Maxim Ignatyev — flew from Baghdad to Istanbul on a Turkish Airlines flight before connecting on a flight to Moscow, the Foreign Ministry said.

“An effort is being made on the Internet to portray us as heroes, but that is not the case,” Vardanyants said in an interview published Monday in *Izvestia*. “We are not heroes. We are idiots who got stuck in this situation because of our own stupidity.”

Shortly after entering Iraq from Turkey, the bikers were briefly detained by a military patrol in the city of Kirkuk.

They were released after the Russian Embassy intervened but ignored embassy advice to leave the country because their papers were not in order, the Russian Foreign Ministry said last week.

The bikers were then detained by a military patrol outside Baghdad on May 20 and jailed at an Iraqi military base, where they were beaten and threatened, Vardanyants said. "There was little to be happy about," he said. "They beat us and threatened us, and the beatings had various levels of severity."

He said the bikers unknowingly had been provided with fake Iraqi visas by a Moscow travel agency, which, he said, had also given them visas for Iran.

They had planned to continue their road trip there after going to Iraq.

After intense diplomatic negotiations, the bikers were released Thursday to the Russian Embassy, where they waited over the weekend for their paperwork to be finalized to leave Iraq.

But their motorcycles remain at the embassy, which has contacted several shipping companies to find out how much it will cost to send them to Russia.

"After that, we'll pass the figures over to the bikers so they can decide which option suits them best," said Sergei Cherkasov, spokesman for the Russian Embassy in Baghdad.

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