

'Russian Spy' Executed in Islamic State Video Was Perfume Salesman

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An image from the video of one of the purported spies, who gave his name as Sergei Ashimov.

A video released by Islamic State reportedly showing two alleged Russian spies being executed has been deemed a fake by experts, after one of the men was revealed as a street cleaner, a news report said Thursday.

The video, published Tuesday by the terrorist group's media wing, featured two men who said they were agents of Russia's Federal Security Service and had attempted to infiltrate the Islamist group in Syria.

The self-proclaimed spies, Sergei Ashimov and Jambulat Mamayev, were then shown being shot in the back of the head by an IS child soldier.

The video has attracted the attention of Russian diplomats in Damascus, who on Wednesday said they were looking into the incident.

But experts immediately cast doubt on the video's authenticity and cited evidence of it being staged.

Kommersant newspaper had a criminologist point out that the video did not show the wounded men after they were supposedly shot.

The report also noted that neither of the men, both of whom identified themselves as Muslims, prayed before being 'executed.'

Will Geddes, an expert on counterterrorism and security from the company International Corporate Protection, said in comments carried by online news portal Newsru.com that the absence of footage showing bullet wounds on the men suggests they were not actually shot.

Magnus Ranstorp, a Swedish expert on terrorism, agreed with this assessment in comments to Kommersant on Thursday.

"It may be set up for propaganda purposes," he said. "If it's staged, it can serve two purposes: as a warning to the Russian security services and those working with them, and as a demonstration of the potential of young terrorists, called 'the cubs of the caliphate.'"

The background information on the two self-proclaimed Russian spies gathered by Kommersant revealed Ashimov to be a street-cleaner-turned-perfume-salesman from Kazakhstan.

In social media, he previously identified himself as a Russian convert to Islam, asking that friends call him Abdullah. In 2011, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca as part of his conversion, according to Kommersant.

The report also cited one of Ashimov's friends as saying he had disappeared about a year ago and not even his wife knew of his whereabouts.

Less is known about Mamayev, the other supposed spy shown being executed in the video. Mamayev, who called himself Seifullakh on social media sites, was discovered to be from the small town of Merke in southern Kazakhstan. He also has several children.

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