

Stupid Kidnappers and Killers

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Police have arrested the suspected kidnappers of Ivan Kaspersky, son of Yevgeny Kaspersky, the software tycoon and co-owner of Kaspersky Laboratories. According to the police, the kidnappers were surprisingly “stupid and audacious.” That’s no exaggeration. The crime was allegedly masterminded by Nikolai Savelyev, 61, and his wife, Lyudmila, 64, along with their 29-year-old son and two of his friends. Police say the Savelyevs held Ivan, 20, in their own home and even allowed him to call from his own cell phone from this location.

But the Savelyevs would not be the only criminals to demonstrate stupidity or carelessness.

For example, when the son of Rosneft vice president Mikhail Stavsky was kidnapped two years ago, his abductors got into a car accident as they left the scene of the crime. Their car was later towed from the crash site directly to their home. Despite this obvious trail, the police only began searching for the kidnappers after journalist Sergei Kanev of Novaya Gazeta reported the crime. Incidentally, these were no ordinary kidnappers but hardcore Islamists who were out to raise money for jihad, police said.

The same thing happens with high-profile murders. The three assassins who shot Central Bank First Deputy Chairman Andrei Kozlov received \$20,000 collectively for their work, and yet one of the killers was foolish enough to send an SMS from the scene of the crime to his

girlfriend in Kiev.

The Makhmudov brothers who have been charged in the murder of Novaya Gazeta reporter Anna Politkovskaya also purportedly used their own cell phones to make calls from the scene of the crime.

Another example: Nikita Tikhonov and Yevgenia Khasis, accused of killing lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova. Police said they found an enormous amount of information on the suspects' computer describing how to organize terrorist attacks and avoid police surveillance. The gun used to shoot Markelov was purportedly found during a body search of Tikhonov. What's more, rather than throw away or destroy the coat that carried gun powder markings linking him to the shooting, he gave it to a friend who happened to work at the muckraking newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda.

The amateur way these crimes were carried out stands in stark contrast to the "professionalism" of the contract killings of the early 1990s, when, for example, a killer would dress in women's clothing and carry his machine gun in a stroller, or disguise himself as a homeless drunk and lie in wait in a stairwell for two weeks to catch his victim.

The real reason for the increase in these sloppy crimes and stupid criminals is that the police have essentially stopped investigating serious crimes.

The actual number of murders in Russia is about 40 per 100,000 people. That is 10 times higher than in the United States, 40 times higher than in Europe and equal to the level in some of the worst African countries. Worse, most of the murders are never even registered, much less investigated.

There has also been a sharp increase in the number of kidnappings in recent years. According to Novaya Gazeta journalist Kanev, nearly 60 venders have been kidnapped from Moscow's Mytishchinsky market in the past year alone. One of the gangs behind the kidnappings, according to Kanev, is the Sofrinsky brigade of Interior Ministry troops headed by former soldier Alexander Kvint. He was arrested and even brought to trial once for the attempted kidnapping of a wealthy businessman, but was later released.

The elite Bison squad, which belongs to the Interior Ministry and functions as the personal security force for Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev, also carries out kidnappings for hire, Kanev says. Although those agents specialize in breaking up demonstrations and rallies by political protesters and earn salaries three to four times higher than ordinary police, that doesn't stop them from earning a little extra money on the side, judging by the number of criminal cases against them.

It is disturbing to ponder that the "stupid and audacious" crimes, such as the high-profile Kaspersky kidnapping or the Kozlov murder, are just the tip of the iceberg for these bumbling criminals — that they may have committed numerous other stupid crimes before. The reason they weren't apprehended earlier is simply that those crimes were never investigated — or even registered.

And then one day, they commit a high-profile crime that gets widely reported in the news and — bingo — they are caught. Not because they were any more careless than they were before,

but simply because the authorities had no other choice but investigate and press charges.

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