

Iraqi Authorities Release Jailed Russian Bikers

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Four bikers, like the one above on a Moscow avenue, were arrested in Iraq and allegedly accused of being spies. **Sergei Porter**

Four Russian motorcycle tourists who spent five days in an Iraqi jail after entering the Middle Eastern country without valid visas have been released and are set to fly home Saturday.

The bikers entered Iraq from the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region, which they did not need visas to enter, RIA-Novosti reported Friday.

After entering Iraq, the bikers — Oleg Kapkayev, Alexander Vardanyants, Oleg Maximov and Maxim Ignatyev — were detained in the city of Kirkuk as they headed toward Baghdad. They were released only after the Russian Embassy stepped in.

Outside Baghdad, the bikers were arrested again, this time by men wearing military uniforms, who took them to an Iraqi military base, news reports said. Alexander Orlov, a member of the Moscow-based motorcycle club RAMCC, said the bikers were severely beaten while in Iraqi custody. NTV television said the men were accused by the Iraqis of being spies. (Related

article: [4 Russian Bikers Held as Spies in Iraq](#))

Human rights ombudsman Mikhail Fedotov wrote Friday on Twitter that the bikers had obtained Iraqi visas through a tour agency and the visas turned out to be fake.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said Friday that Iraqi authorities had arrested the bikers strictly to ensure their own safety, RIA-Novosti reported.

The security situation in Iraq is unstable following a military invasion and occupation by the United States that officially ended in December.

On Thursday, the Foreign Ministry negotiated the bikers' release. The four men were set free Friday and put up in the Russian Embassy in Baghdad, RIA-Novosti reported. Orlov told the news agency that the bikers would fly back to Russia on Saturday morning.

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