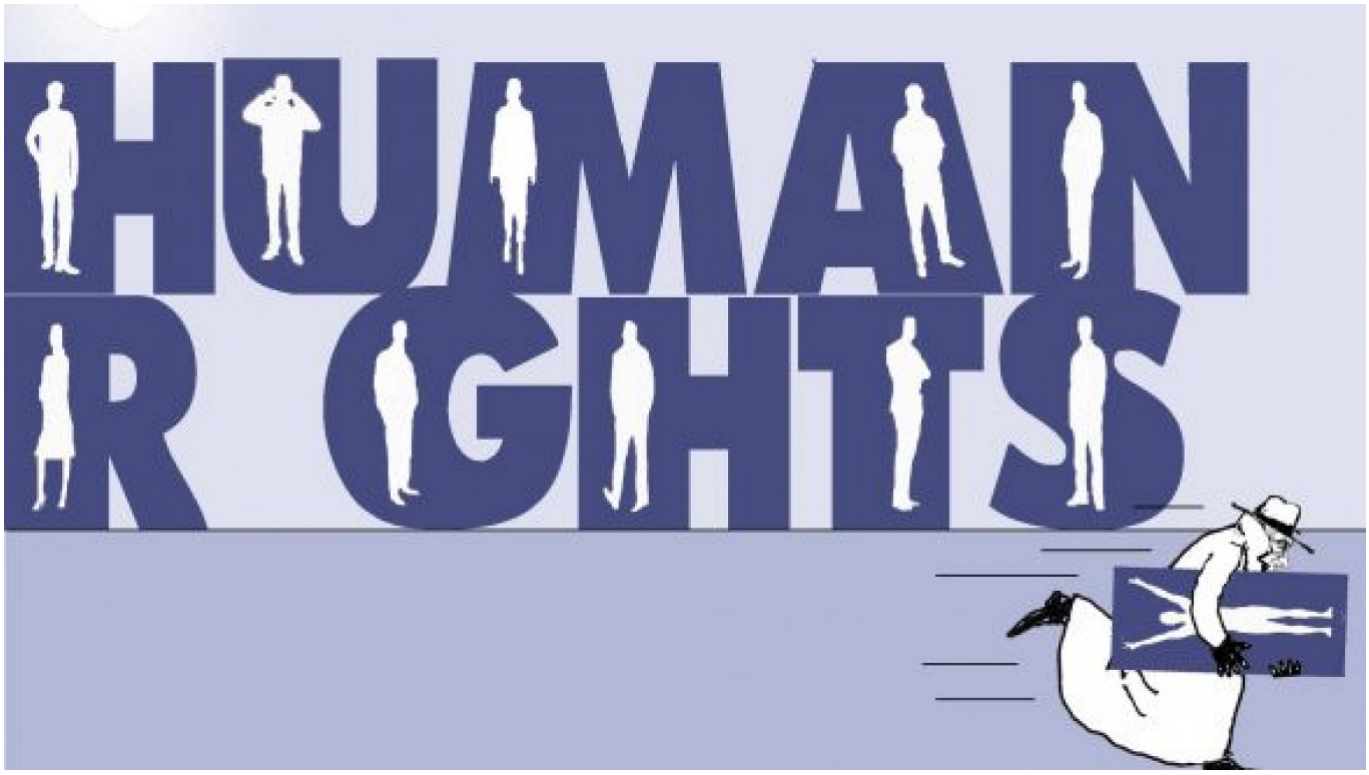
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Kidnapping Dissenters Is an Old KGB Tradition

By Victor Davidoff

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On the morning of Oct. 19, Leonid Razvozzhayev, an activist in the Left Front movement, arrived at the Kiev office of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, or HIAS, for a consultation on applying for political asylum status in Ukraine. At 1 p.m. he left his things in the office and went out to buy some coffee and a bite to eat. He never returned. A HIAS security guard saw several men in civilian clothing push Razvozzhayev into a minivan. He tried to stop them, but they pushed him away. They drove Razvozzhayev away.

On the evening of Oct. 21, Razvozzhayev appeared before the Basmanny District Court in Moscow, which ordered his arrest for plotting to incite mass riots. When he was led out of the court, Razvozzhayev shouted to journalists, "Tell people I've been tortured."

Human rights ombudsman Vladimir Lukin visited Razvozzhayev in the Lefortovo prison and said he was being held in solitary confinement, had not been allowed to choose his own lawyer, and that Razvozzhayev had refused the services of the lawyer present with him in court. Lukin, however, did not say a word about where Razvozzhayev had been for two days

and how he got from Kiev to Moscow. There was nothing about this in the Investigative Committee's official statement, which reported that Razvozzhayev surrendered voluntarily to Russian authorities.

The truth of what happened to Razvozzhayev came out only when a group of human rights activists met with him in Lefortovo. His story sounds like it came out of a sequel to "The Godfather." One of the activists who met with him, Anna Karetnikova, posted Razvozzhayev's statement on her LiveJournal blog.

"In the minivan, they taped my hands and feet. If I made any attempt to move I was kicked in the back or shoulder. They covered my face so I couldn't see where I was going. After we crossed the border, they put handcuffs with chains over the tape, shackling together my hands and feet. Those shackles were kept on until we got to Moscow. They didn't give me food or water, and they didn't let me go to the toilet. They took me into the cellar of some house. They began to threaten me, saying that no one knew where I was. 'Today you're here, tomorrow you're an unmarked grave.' They demanded that I sign a confession and said only that would save me."

The truth of Razvozzhayev's story was confirmed by Ukraine's Interior Ministry, which said he had been kidnapped by Russian operatives.

And so it seems that today's Federal Security Service is using the practices of the Soviet political police. Starting in the 1920s, Soviet intelligence agents started kidnapping political enemies who had emigrated. In 1937, they kidnapped Yevgeny Miller, leader of the White Army movement in France. He was brought to Moscow, imprisoned at KGB headquarters on Lubyanka and executed in 1939. In 1975 in Vienna, the KGB kidnapped Nikolai Artamonov, a Navy captain who had defected. Former KGB General Oleg Kalugin, who took part in the operation, said that before crossing the Austrian border, they injected Artamonov with a sedative. The dose turned out to be too powerful, and Artamonov died.

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny told Afisha magazine that "the authorities' illegal violent actions are their reaction to their clear loss of control over the situation. Their control is based primarily on Putin's popularity. And we see that people are already booing his motorcade. The authorities are stepping up repressions to compensate for their loss of control."

Navalny and other opposition leaders called for protests against Razvozzhayev's kidnapping and torture. Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov stated that only street protests can stop the growing repression of political activists. In an interview on Ekho Moskvy radio, Udaltsov said, "That's the only thing they're scared of. If we don't protest, we'll just be bringing each other care packages in prison. Meanwhile, the totalitarian winter will last another 12 years."

Unfortunately, Udaltsov's grim prediction is likely to come true. Like in the Soviet Union, Russia's organized opposition is too weak to force the authorities to deal with them. President Vladimir Putin is conducting a policy of no negotiations with the opposition, and the movement's only protection — like during the Cold War — is international support. Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department have already called upon the Russian authorities to investigate the circumstances of Razvozzhayev's abduction. But it looks like the West's window of opportunity for mild diplomatic statements and requests has slammed shut. The Foreign Ministry immediately declared such statements to be "inappropriate."

In the last six months, Russia has turned on a decisively anti-Western course. It is turning into a classic rogue state that doesn't respect human rights or international law. It's certainly useless to try to establish a partnership with such a state, and it may even be counterproductive.

In the 1970s, a similar policy of detente led to several proxy wars and extended the Cold War for at least 10 more years. A repeat of that mistake today could cost the West and Russian citizens dearly.

Victor Davidoff is a Moscow-based writer and journalist who follows the Russian blogosphere in his biweekly column.

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