
Interview of Chairman of the Investigative Committee of Russia Alexander Bastrykin to Rossiyskaya Gazeta



Evidence Matrix

Alexander Bastrykin: DNA data-bank created in the Forensics Centre of the Investigative Committee of Russia

Alexander Ivanovich, the Forensics Centre of the Investigative Committee of Russia is one of the most enclosed departments of your Committee. Would you please tell us a little about how it works?

Alexander Bastrykin: Officers of the Forensics Centre promptly arrive at crime scenes to provide

practical and methodological assistance in initial investigative actions. A number of mobile groups consisting of highly qualified forensic investigators have been created. They work in shifts 24/7 and immediately fly to any part of the Russian Federation and even to flashpoints outside the country when operative information is received.

There are over 450 mobile forensic laboratories across Russia, which enable the officers to promptly arrive at crime scenes. This year we plan to purchase 11 more mobile laboratories.

Our specialists worked on sites of gas explosions in residential buildings of Shakhty and Krasnoyarsk, the An-148 crash of Saratov Airlines in Moscow Region, emergency landing of Aeroflot SSJ 100 jet in Sheremetyevo Airport, a major traffic accident in Kaluga Region. Specialists of the Main Forensics Directorate provided practical assistance in the investigation into crimes committed by terrorist organizations of the Syrian Arab Republic against Russian servicemen, into former Minister of the Open Government Mikhail Abyzov accused of large-scale embezzlement, etc.

How much has today's forensics evolved?

Alexander Bastrykin: The existing technological and expert capacities enable us to do things that were literally impossible before. Now forensic investigators are capable to detect all possible crime traces, examine them, and obtain important procedural evidence.

This makes it possible to solve past years' crimes. This year, also due to work of forensic units, investigators and operative services, the murder clearance rate increased to 96.6%, the clearance of intended infliction of severe health damage entailing by negligence the death of a victim reached 98.2%, the rape clearance 98.9%.

So you predict the active development of forensics in the literal nearest future.

Alexander Bastrykin: The dynamic development of forensic science is determined by new world achievements and advances in natural and technical sciences, as well as the sophistication of informational technologies.

Forensic experts are ready to quickly tailor emerging technologies for the purpose of a criminal investigation, obtaining evidence of involvement of certain persons and successfully solving the most complicated offenses.

Genetic Portrait from Records

Genetics plays a special role in solving grave offenses. Is there any database of DNA traces?

Alexander Bastrykin: Indeed, capacities of DNA examination of traces left at a crime scene now play the key part in solving and investigation of crimes, including those consisting of several

episodes.

I have to say that experts of the Investigative Committee of Russia have accumulated a positive experience of genotype extraction from traces containing trace amounts of biological material of a perpetrator, such as skin oil traces of their hands on ropes, clothes, and other surfaces unfit for traditional fingerprinting. As a result, hand traces acquire additional capacities of their use for identification of the perpetrator (apart from traditional fingerprinting). It is very important since hand traces are extracted at every third crime scene.

We accumulate all obtained data in a single DNA register of the Investigative Committee of Russia. At present, this register contains 31,988 verified DNA profiles of persons under observation as a result of performed examinations.

It happens that after a long period of time DNA data extracted from a crime scene match with data of a certain person under investigation of another probe. This year, processing of DNA data through register resulted in the identification of traces for 182 probes.

Or, for example, there are several unsolved crimes with extracted biological traces. Their examination determining the identity of DNA profiles makes it possible to conclude that the crimes are serial. This year, we have established DNA matches of unidentified perpetrators of 25 unsolved crimes and I am sure that their arrest is just a matter of time.

What other kinds of work we don't know about is performed by forensic specialists?

Alexander Bastrykin: Apart from the tasks I have already mentioned, forensic specialists carry out search activities, activities on memory enhancement of witnesses and victims, they also prepare identikit pictures of suspects and carry out forensic examinations.

In H1 2019, officers of the Forensic Centre examined over 1,300 probes and 450 materials of procedural probes into reports on missing citizens, murders of citizens, discovering of bodies without explicit signs of death and sexual crimes including those against minors.

Upon examination, it was recommended to resume an investigation of 175 probes. Officers of the Forensics Centre took part in carrying out of over 390 investigative actions, the results of which were used for the identification of involved persons and provided grounds for bringing them to justice.

What is the most frequent means of achieving success in crime solving?

Alexander Bastrykin: If we are talking about the forensic component, a combination of factors is important here, including the analytical abilities of certain officers, technical and expert components.

For example, carrying out consistent work of solving past years' crimes, investigators and forensics specialists managed to find a person guilty of rape and murder of a 16-year-old girl in Kostroma Region in 2003. Results of a DNA examination of the biological traces found at the crime scene proved the involvement in these crimes of a local citizen already serving a prison sentence. Under the weight of the evidence gathered, the convict reported circumstances of the committed offense. He was sentenced to 23 years of imprisonment.

Another similar example where the expert component played a major part is an investigation into the disappearance of a man in St. Petersburg in 2018. Investigators thoroughly checked the social circle of the missing person. It was found out that the man visited the country house of his acquaintance. Forensic investigators detected biological traces in this house. Results of DNA examinations proved that they belonged to the victim. This established the involvement of the house owner in the offense; he stood trial.

How to Make Witnesses Talk

What if examinations fail to provide results leading to any important conclusions?

Alexander Bastrykin: Indeed, there are some quite obvious crimes that lack direct evidence of the involvement of certain persons. Such crimes are often solved due to the initiative, experience, and analytical abilities of officers of the Investigative Committee of Russia.

For example, the murder of a senior woman in Kaliningrad remained unsolved since 2002. She was strangled. The involvement of members of the inner social circle of the victim was checked several times; however, this version was not confirmed. Despite the time that passed, officers of the Main Forensics Directorate suggested checking the social circle of the victim once again. Investigators established psychological contact with the victim's grandson who was 24 years old at the moment of the crime. During interrogation, he gave testimony that his father, who is no longer alive, strangled the senior woman. This testimony was fully confirmed by data on the victim's injuries that had already been submitted to the probe materials. Thus, many years after we solved another especially grave offense.

In this example, the witness testimony had significant importance. How credible could it be if many years passed since the moment of crime?

Alexander Bastrykin: Of course, when we are talking about information provided by a witness, we have to take into account a lot of factors, including their psychological state at the moment of perceiving the information, age, and other aspects.

We have individual specialists who deal with issues in the field of psychology on the compilation of subjective drawn portraits. This year we have carried out various events of memory enhancement related to 264 witnesses and victims, including 110 minors. 87 subjective drawn and photoshopped

portraits have been made in interaction with psychology specialists and as a result of rebuilding appearance from the existing photo (including postmortem) and video materials of a number of probes.

This work facilitated solving a number of crimes. For example, in Leningrad Region, under investigation of a firearm-related murder, investigators carried out activities to enhance the memory of several witnesses and a victim in order to clarify the description of the appearance of persons involved in the offense.

Their words provided for a sketch of one of the perpetrators who was subsequently identified by the photo. At present, investigators are taking measures to identify his accomplices.

As is known, crimes are more and more often committed via the Internet and remotely. How can you counter them?

Alexander Bastrykin: The practice has shown that the crime rate and cross-border illegal activities in electronic information and telecommunication networks, as well as indicators of their use as the main tool, will be dramatically increasing since the Internet will more and more often become the crime scene. We continue the approbation of big data analysis complexes that enable us to process and analyze information including that from open sources (social networks). It's possible that they will be soon implemented in the investigative practice.

There were some instances when criminal cases were solved using space imagery data. How can they assist the investigation?

Alexander Bastrykin: From January to June 2019, we processed 36 investigative requests for providing data of Earth remote sensing; 300 survey tracks were received, including 146 Russian images. For a number of probes, data of Earth remote sensing provided by the Forensics Centre served as the basis for the indictment. Satellite images are in the most demanded during the investigation of official misconducts, economic and environmental offenses, and violations related to corruption.

Bribe-Taker Given away by His Voice

How is the work of forensic specialists for corruption offenses organized?

Alexander Bastrykin: Expert surveillance of investigation of offenses involving corruption includes carrying out required examinations including phonoscopic, computer technical, economic-forensic, and other examinations. For example, in Lipetsk, officers of the Regional Authority for Road Traffic Safety equipped their computers with software that input right answers in electronic examination tickets for driving license regardless of answers actually chosen by test-takers. Experts of the Forensic Centre of the Investigative Committee of Russia detected the software and

established the algorithm of its work.

During the investigation of another probe involving an investigator of the South-West Administrative District Department of the Internal Affairs Directorate of the Moscow Main Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, an audio record obtained during the operative experiment became the main piece of evidence. Experts of the Forensic Centre carried out a phonoscopic examination to obtain irrefutable proof of involvement of the investigator in committing the offense.

Are there any problems in the work of your forensic experts? What mistakes are the most typical?

Alexander Bastrykin: Today, the forensics units of the territorial bodies of the Investigative Committee of Russia, in general, provide an appropriate level of forensic support for the investigation, and their employees work faithfully, responsibly, and diligently in all areas assigned to the forensics service.

However, one cannot say that the organization of the work of forensic investigators is free from flaws, of course. Unfortunately, there are sometimes lapses during the initial stage of investigation. From time to time, forensic investigators fail to use special equipment or to follow recommendations for sequence and comprehensiveness of examination of a crime scene; we still can see a formal approach to the education of young investigators and neglect to provide assistance to them during complex investigative actions.

Not all units have developed close interaction with units that perform search activities and forensic experts; lack of such joint work makes it impossible to promptly solve and investigate crimes. We know about these drawbacks and work on them.

Recently, amendments were made to the legislation related to conducting examinations by subdivisions of the Investigative Committee of Russia. How can it influence the development of forensics?

Alexander Bastrykin: The amendments provided for by Federal Law No 224-FZ of July 26, 2019, “On Amendments to the Federal Law “On State Forensic Expertise in the Russian Federation” and the Federal Law “On the Investigative Committee of Russia” will enter into force on October 25.

Thus, the rules for the establishment and operation of an in-house forensic institution in the Investigative Committee of Russia are set, as well as the procedure to conduct forensic examinations by our experts for a transitional period.

These amendments created optimal conditions for the development of expert capacities of the Committee that are necessary to combat grave and especially grave crimes under the jurisdiction of the Investigative Committee of Russia.

Now the experts have an opportunity to use the mechanisms of arrangement and performance of forensic examinations, confirmation of the level of one's professional training, validation of the developed expert methods, as well as approbation and introduction of the newest achievements of science and technology into the expert activity, which have proved their worth in the state forensic institutions.

You have mentioned that units of the Investigative Committee use Russian equipment. Are you developing new devices for technology-intensive examinations?

Alexander Bastrykin: For several years already, the Investigative Committee of Russia has been successfully tackling the task of import substitution of forensic equipment. I think that the characteristics of Russian equipment must not only match but be superior to foreign analogs.

At the moment, we are creating a classification of forensic equipment subject to import substitution together with concerned ministries and agencies and the Trade and Industry Ministry. At the same time, officers of the Committee take part in a search for Russian companies with resources and developments required for producing the sophisticated equipment for DNA examinations, search activities, and examining microscopic objects.

The integration of capacities of Russian producers and scientific achievements of the Russian Academy of Sciences will not only resolve the issue of import substitution but will also facilitate the development of the innovative potential of the country.

Where do they teach forensics?

Alexander Bastrykin: The Moscow and St. Petersburg Academies of the Investigative Committee of Russia have Forensics Departments, specialists of which train students in this area.

Apart from that, enrolled officers of the Investigative Committee of Russia are subject to staff selection depending on the required knowledge obtained in the higher educational institution. During their service, they are given internships in their local investigative units, the Academies of the Investigative Committee of Russia, and in the Main Forensics Directorate (Forensics Centre).

In this, the Academies have forensic laboratories and a Master program aimed at forensic surveillance of preliminary investigation of offenses. In the St. Petersburg Academy, we are also planning to create a forensic research laboratory center with forensic test sites to build practical skills.

In addition, the establishment of the Faculty of Forensic Investigation is under consideration.

These very institutions also provide for additional training. This September, we have also started to train forensic investigators on a part-time basis.

Internet as a Crime Scene

There is an R&D institute in the Forensics Centre. What does it study and research?

Alexander Bastrykin: The Research and Development Institute was created to analyze the law enforcement practice. During the investigation, we can determine trends of processes that go in in the society.

We have specialists that can analyze this information and suggest solutions to certain problems.

This year, the Forensics R&D Institute carried out various research on many relevant subjects. One of them is related to issues of the so-called school shooting. This phenomenon originated in the USA. According to one American newspaper, shootings in US schools happened approximately 40 times in 2018 and H1 2019 alone.

We have a different situation; however, modern young people are greatly affected by widespread information on crime means. Research of the Forensics R&D Institute provided a basis for the development of recommendations for a number of relevant agencies. I want to believe that it will help to predict and prevent tragedies.

Apart from that, based on the examination and analysis of 869 episodes of illegal activities, the R&D Institute developed criminal characteristics of sexually motivated serial murders and serial sexual crimes and created an electronic database that will be used to update methodologies of their investigation. The R&D Institute is also working in other relevant areas.

In your opinion, what is the role of forensic specialists in investigation?

Alexander Bastrykin: The present time features fast changes in criminal structure, upgrading means and tools of criminal activities. However, it is known that there are no crimes without traces. Traces are a key to crime-solving, and forensics, which is one of the major present tools for establishing the truth, examines them.

Today no high-impact crime stays away from the close attention of forensic investigators. They ensure prompt and high-quality forensic and expert surveillance of the investigation of crimes using advanced methodologies and the latest high-technology equipment.

Did digitalization of the society make any adjustments to the work of forensic specialists?

Alexander Bastrykin: Lately the need to examine a big number of data storage devices has grown significantly. This year our specialists have examined over 2,500 devices and items containing information in electronic format which already exceeds last year's number.

Thus, for example, data of mobile storage devices provided significant information on a theft scheme under a probe into embezzlement of 19.4 million rubles from the federal budget during the concluding and implementation of a state contract. I cannot reveal the details of how to seize and analyze such information, it is an investigatory privilege, but we see its effectiveness.

Video records and photo images are to be mentioned separately. In the vast majority of cases, a prompt examination of video records and fast obtaining of data of interest for investigation is a basis for solving crimes and identification of involved persons. Thus, during the investigation of the death of people in the fire in the Zimnyaya Vishnya mall in Kemerovo, it was necessary to examine footages from all recorders of the building and surrounding area.

Another example is the probe into the murder of senior special investigator of the Transport Directorate of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia Elena Shishkina.

During the investigation, a single specialist examined over 100 digital objects with video records of the total volume of approximately 300 Tb. As a result, 11,300 vehicles were detected, and the identification numbers of the vehicles used by the direct perpetrator of the crime were established after thorough analytical work, and his accomplice was subsequently identified and detained.

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