



Georgia's Lingering Border Security Issues

OE Watch Commentary: A few months ago an editorial in the military section of Georgian media outlet *Kvirispalitra* highlighted a lingering problem associated with Georgia and its two breakaway regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The article focused on a reoccurring security issue that has outlasted both formal conflicts (South Ossetia 1989-1990 and 2008; Abkhazia 1992-1993) and serves as a painful reminder of the loss of Georgian life and territory. Almost immediately after the end of hostilities in South Ossetia (1990) and Abkhazia (1993), killings and assassinations continued to occur along the newly established borders between Georgia proper and the breakaway republics.

Georgia has not been able to do much about the continued violence on what are considered artificial borders, but as the article notes, violence has not only occurred against Georgians but also against Georgia's enemies, suggesting that Georgian secret or "special services" are also active, sending a message to those who would conspire against and occupy Georgian lands, including Russia.



Damaged Bridge across the Inguri River separating the separatist region of Abkhazia from Georgia proper.
Source: Photo by Dodge Billingsley

Last year, the Georgian parliament seemed to take a cue from *Myrotvorets*, a Ukrainian based website that published a list of over 100,000 individuals accused of crimes against Ukrainians and the Ukrainian state. The Georgian list of 33 individuals pales in number, and as the author admits, nothing has been done to apprehend and bring to justice these purported perpetrators. The Georgian list, known as the Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili List, is named for two Georgians, Gigi Otkhozoria who was killed on Georgia-Abkhazia frontier and Archil Tatunashvili, who was killed on the Georgia-South Ossetia de facto border.

The overall tone of the article suggests that Georgian counter-terrorism operations (many Georgians see separatist and Russian action against Georgia as terrorism) are not only justified but the only response to continued occupation, claiming, "the only action that can put a stop to these crimes is the principle of vengeance." This tit-for-tat response is a risky proposition. In the past, these sorts of operations have destabilized inherently unstable regions and escalated the tension along the border areas, leading to spikes in violent action against civilians and subsequently more internally displaced people.

Finally, the article suggests that establishing a Georgian database similar to *Myrotvorets* in Ukraine could be a useful tool in bringing justice upon those who conduct acts against the Georgian state. The question is whether it will help recover separatist controlled territory or lead to a new round of violence. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

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Source: “სისხლი სისხლის წილ - შურისძიება საიდუმლო ოპერაციებით?! (Blood for Blood: Revenge of Secret Operations?!),” *Kvirispalitra*, 22 April 2019. <https://www.kvirispalitra.ge/samkhedro-thema/52815-siskhli-siskhlis-tsil-shurisdzieba-saidumlo-operaciebith.html>

“In the special services of Georgia there is the potential, i.e., trained personnel, special equipment and weapons, that those on the Otkhozorai-Tatunashvili list are dealt with. So the public can see that the perpetrators of torture of Georgian citizens will not go unpunished. This, first of all, will increase the favorable rating of the government in the eyes of its citizens.”

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