



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების კვლევის ფონდი
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Security Review

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**Assessment of the Major Threats to Georgia Based on the Annual Reports of the
State Security Service**

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The annual reports of the State Security Service of Georgia have been published for the last three years.¹ Along with a description of the tasks fulfilled during the reporting period, the reports also include an assessment of the threats that Georgia faces.

The reports are published according to the Law of Georgia on the State Security Service of Georgia. Paragraph 2 of Article 9 of the law defines: “Once a year, no later than April 15, the Head of the Service or Deputy Head of the Service shall submit to the Parliament of Georgia a report of the activities carried out during the previous year.”

Based on the reports of the State Security Service this document has the following objectives:

- Identification of the major threats to Georgia from the latest (2017) annual report of the State Security Service of Georgia;
- Assessment of the dynamics of Georgia’s security environment based on all three reports of the State Security Service;
- Identification of the major shifts that have taken place within Georgia’s security environment.

Major Threats to Georgia Based on the Annual Report of the State Security Service for 2017

The annual report of the State Security Service of Georgia for 2017 defines the following major threats to Georgia’s security:

- *The main threats to Georgia are the occupation of the territories of Georgia and the presence of the Russian armed forces in the occupied regions;*
- *The Russian military contingent mobilized in large numbers in the occupied territories, the increasing militarization process and the intense military drills on the ground are threats of such a scale that they threaten not only Georgia but the entire South Caucasian region;*
- *The situation in the occupied Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia, which are not controlled by the central Government of Georgia, makes it possible for the special services of the Russian Federation to initiate or stage terrorist activities for its own operational, military and political intentions;*
- *Russian occupational forces and de facto authorities openly conduct deliberate discrimination of ethnic Georgians living in the occupied territories by restrictions on free*

¹ The annual report of the State Security Service of Georgia is available at the following link: <https://ssg.gov.ge/en/page/info/reports>.

movement and access to education in the native language, detentions for so-called illegal border crossing reasons and forcing the payment of increased amounts of so-called fines;

- *The illegal process of “borderization” along the occupation line led by the representatives of the Russian Federal Security Service remains as a challenge;*

- *The situation on the occupied territories provides fertile ground for illegal financial operations;*

- *The major objectives of foreign intelligence services in Georgia are to: encourage anti-Western sentiments in Georgian society, damage Georgia’s image as a reliable partner at the international level, stimulate distrust, uncertainty, hopelessness and nihilism in society, and create a destabilizing base on ethnic and religious grounds with the aim of cultivating disintegration processes throughout the country and promoting the polarization of Georgian society;*

- *To fulfil their tasks, the intelligence services of various countries still actively use the “hybrid war” tactic. Trying to achieve the desired goal through this tactic, they use the propagandist media campaign and the disinformation components, cyber operations and certain cyberattacks, destructive political groups and socio-populist unions;*

- *The tactic of the intelligence services conducting a “hybrid war” is distinguished by diversity and is directed against Georgia’s national interests, democratic values, institutions and the rule of law;*

- *As part of the global trend, the amount of “Islamic State” supporters and their influences have been reduced in Georgia. The youth refuse to become members of groups supporting “Islamic State” ideology and influential leaders once supporting the organization leave their ranks;*

- *Supposedly, the “Islamic State” will strengthen its ideological efforts and by the use of modern technologies, including social media, the terrorist organization will attempt to radicalize and recruit more individuals;*

- *Unlike recent years when the “Islamic State” carried out massive military operations, the trend in 2017 has shown that terrorist attacks became a major tool of the terrorist organization;*

- *Throughout 2017 the terrorist threats in our region and in other countries across the world did not decrease;*

- *In 2017, Georgia faced some significant and, to some extent, critical challenges. The facts of attempts at financing terrorism, supporting extremist and terrorist ideas and radicalizing certain citizens of Georgia took place;*

- *Foreign nationals residing in Georgia who might be supporting terrorist organizations pose a threat to the country. In most cases, these civilians are not linked to Georgia and*

Georgian society, either historically and culturally or ethnically and religiously, and this makes it easier for terrorist organizations to engage them in extremist activities;

- *For the time being, about 30 citizens of Georgia are fighting in the ranks of various terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq;*

- *As a result of operative activities and in cooperation with international partners, several thousand foreign nationals have been identified who might be linked to terrorism and may attempt to use Georgia as a transit location.*

Evolution of the Major Threats to Georgia Based on the Reports of the State Security Service of Georgia for 2015, 2016 and 2017

According to the annual reports of the State Security Service of Georgia for 2015, 2016 and 2017, no dramatic changes were detected in Georgia's security environment during this period. Almost similar threats are identified in each of these annual reports.

Among the threats identified, the occupation of Georgia's territories and the deployment of the Russian armed forces in these territories is defined as the greatest threat for Georgia. The threat is defined as an "existential" threat in the annual reports for 2015 and 2016 years and a "main" threat in the annual report for 2017.

Russia's attempt to annex the occupied territories of Georgia is mentioned in all three annual reports which is an explicit indication of the end state that Moscow most probably intends regarding these territories.

Beyond the collection of intelligence, the attempts to have impact on Georgia's internal and external policy is identified as the major task for foreign intelligence agencies which significantly undermines Georgia's security.

Despite the fact that Georgia is not considered as a major target of international terrorism, attention is still drawn to the shift from conventional warfare to terrorist attacks by the "Islamic State" that enhances the terrorism threat to Georgia to at least some extent.

Along with all of the above mentioned, the threat on the part of international terrorist groups to use Georgia as a transit country is still valid.

Most Significant Shifts in Georgia's Security Environment Based on the Reports of Georgia's State Security Service for 2015, 2016 and 2017

First and foremost, it should be mentioned that the annual report for 2017 differs from the previous ones as it makes more emphasis on the assessment of the threats to Georgia. The

previous annual reports only addressed the threats in brief while drawing a close look at the description of the work conducted by the State Security Service of Georgia.

Considering that, those new threats identified in the annual report of 2017, might come as a result of the above mentioned new approach of the report development, however it is still worth to examine them carefully.

It is also worth mentioning that making emphasis on threat identification in this type of document corresponds to Western practice. The replication of this practice in the Georgian context should be assessed positively.

According to the annual reports of the State Security Service of Georgia, the major shifts in Georgia's security environment are as follows:

1. Initiating or staging terrorist attacks by Russian intelligence agencies utilizing the situation in occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region in order to meet its political or military goals.

This type of threat had not been identified either in the 2015 or the 2016 annual reports. Consequently, it might be assumed that Russia's intentions regarding Georgia have become more aggressive.

2. The "hybrid warfare" tactic, which is actively utilized against Georgia, and its main goals are widely discussed in the chapter addressing counterintelligence activities.

In contrast to the previous annual reports, the use of the term "hybrid warfare" in the annual report for 2017, with the extensive discussion of its distinct goals, should be considered as an indication of the growing activity of the Russian intelligence agencies in Georgia.

3. Conducting illegal financial operations through the occupied territories of Georgia.

In comparison to the two previous threats, this particular threat comprises a minor direct danger to Georgia's national security although it does have significant political importance. A detailed identification of this illicit activity would explicitly outline the scale of the danger that the uncontrollable situation on the occupied territories brings for international security. Simultaneously, the case represents a concrete example of the utilization of the uncontrolled situation within the occupied territories of Georgia for the implementation of specific goals by the Russian Federation.

Conclusion

According to the overview of Georgia's security environment, the origins as well as the nature of the threats it faces are mainly different and, in some cases, emanate from both regional and global trends. However, it is very explicit that the Russian Federation is the source of the main and existential threats to Georgia.

According to Russia's vision, the modern world is in a transition from a unipolar to a multipolar international system and Russia considers itself as one of the strongest poles in the coming multipolar international system, possessing an exclusive sphere of influence. The restoration of its control over the post-Soviet space is considered by Russia as a necessary precondition for achieving this end. Subsequently, any decline in its destructive activities regarding Georgia seems highly unlikely in the near future.

Obviously, Russia's destructive activities here are the most important issue in relation to Georgia's security environment. At the moment, the situation is not very challenging but it is very complicated with the risk of deterioration considering Russia's negative impact, first and foremost. This should be taken into consideration very scrupulously in the process of planning Georgia's national security.