



## **Georgian Security and Intelligence Services: Ideas for Reforms**

**By Revaz Bakhtadze**

This paper attempts to propose some ideas for reforms of the two essential actors of the Georgian security sector – Security Service of Georgia (SSG) and Georgian Intelligence Service (GIS). While independent from each other, both agencies share many similarities in terms of challenges and needs. Hence, the paper tries to address the problems common to both services. The suggestions below are not ready-made recipes but rather an attempt to contribute to the discussion about the future development of special services in Georgia.

### **“Ninety percent of the game is half mental”\***

People are the single most important resource in any special service. Recruitment, training and retention of staff are one of the most acute problems facing Georgian special services. Recruitment consists of protracted and often bureaucratized procedures. The usual justification maintains that the sufficient time is needed to thoroughly examine backgrounds and make sure a candidate is credible and suitable for the job. However, many professionals familiar with those procedures (your humble author included) may agree that there is a room for improvement to make the process more efficient and the assessment of candidates more holistic.

Many, if not the majority of people working at the Georgian special services hold law degrees. In the case of older generation, this is due to the Soviet legacy when the special security academies granted law degrees to their graduates. However, this tendency persisted. Even after shutting down the 5-year security academy, the recruiters still prefer lawyers by training. Another reason could be that the SSG also has law enforcement functions and can prosecute people. Hence, the need for qualified lawyers. However, the challenges our special services have to deal today are so diverse that they simply cannot do without people with various backgrounds and experiences. Georgian special services need more data analysts, coders, linguists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, chemists, biologists, MBAs, professionals in art and other creative fields.

Lastly, training and development of personnel at various stages of their career constitutes a serious problem. While new curricula have been developed in recent years, they are mostly focused on new recruits. The quality of courses varies as well. The available academic resources in academia are not sufficiently utilized and integrated in the existing training systems. As for the mid-career personnel and upper echelons of the services, no established training modules exist for them.

Further professional development depends on either personal efforts of employees or the goodwill and vision of some executives.

## **Two Competences**

I argue that two competences are the most critical for the mission of Georgian special services: knowledge of foreign languages and cyber-security. Georgia is a multi-ethnic country in the Caucasus region, at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. The ability to understand, recruit and navigate among numerous linguistic and cultural groups across various countries is directly linked to the knowledge of foreign languages. As a central state in the Caucasus, Georgian special services have to focus on the mastery of Caucasian, as well as Russian, Near Eastern and other Asian languages. Critical language programs should be launched at public schools and universities, providing various incentives for students to study the above-mentioned languages. In addition, SSG and GIS may set up a special school for language and culture studies with immersive environments. Proficiency in regional languages and cultures may become our flagship in international intelligence collaborations.

Cyber-security is another key competence. Its importance is widely acknowledged. However, more holistic approach is needed to promote the study of computer sciences and coding at schools and universities. SSG and GIS can play a leading role in these efforts by holding competitions, providing funding for emerging technologies and start-ups.

## **Know Thy History**

In the past thirty years, Georgian special services have gone through tumultuous path of development, marked by controversies, failures, and yes, successes. However, there is no coherent effort to chronicle and analyze these histories. First of all, this is needed for the services themselves: knowing own past, failures and achievements, can help existing and future operators and analysts to avoid many mistakes. Second, the offices of historian at SSG and GIS can study the histories of foreign counterparts and again help improve training of the staff and the quality of their work. Finally, official historians can contribute to raising awareness of public about the activities of Georgian special services by publishing books and periodicals, and thus, increase their legitimacy and appeal to new generation to serve.

## **“The future ain’t what it used to be”**

Deft exploitation of open source intelligence (OSINT) can compensate the lack of financial and human resources (something that small countries suffer from). However, as OSINT data is derived from unclassified sources, it lacks sufficient respect in intelligence community of Georgia. Though, such attitudes have started to change recently (especially, in light of rich and granular information that social media are able to provide), intelligence community in Georgia needs to take OSINT more seriously and develop appropriate courses for both analysts and operatives. OSINT means not only Googling but also the ability to sift through numerous data sets and obscure forums. More importantly, SSG and GIS should develop sophisticated methods to filter and understand the abundant information available online. Mastery of OSINT could also facilitate the conduct of covert and influence operations.

**“The other teams could make trouble for us if they win”**

Economic intelligence is an underutilized tool in the Georgian intelligence inventory. Georgia’s adversaries, whether terrorist groups, criminals or states, are integrated in the international economic system. They actively use offshore companies, international banks, art auctions, cryptocurrency, financial and logistical hubs, leaving trails along the way. Often these activities represent their Achilles’ heel. Open and commercial databases, property and company registration information are legally available, often for free or for reasonable fees. By learning how to analyze and use them, Georgian special services can punch above their weight and defeat their otherwise powerful adversaries.

**“If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up someplace else”**

Effective coordination is the main issue here. The national security architecture of Georgia lacks coordination mechanisms for SSG and GIS. A special dedicated unit should be set up under prime minister that could perform 3 main functions: (1) identification of priorities and coordination of special services’ work; (2) budget monitoring of classified programs; (3) producing all-source analysis and assessments for decision-makers.

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\* The phrases used as section headings in the quotation marks belong to the legendary American baseball coach Yogi Berra.