

Georgia Arrests Torture Suspects in New Swipe at Old Government

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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TBILISI — Georgian police on Wednesday arrested nine serving and former police and military officers on suspicion of torture, which the interior minister said was a "systemic problem" under the previous government of President Mikheil Saakashvili.

Dozens of former officials, including a former prime minister, have been arrested since Bidzina Ivanishvili's government took office, on charges such as abuse of power, corruption, illegal confinement and illegally obtaining personal information.

However, Western countries have aired concerns that the new government has used selective justice and political persecution against political opponents in the ex-Soviet republic, a pivot of geopolitical rivalry between the West and Russia.

The nine suspects are accused of involvement in the torture and rape of two detainees depicted on videos found this week in a cache along with guns and drugs, Interior Minister

Irakly Garibashvili said.

"We believe it was a systemic problem ... it was a problem of the previous regime, the previous leadership," he said, adding that "high-ranking officials during whose tenure such terrible things were happening should be held responsible."

Garibashvili told reporters that the alleged torture occurred in 2011, before billionaire Ivanishvili led an opposition coalition to victory in parliamentary elections last October and became prime minister.

He said the victims had been tortured in an attempt to force them to confess to an unspecified crime.

David Bakradze, a lawmaker from Saakashvili's United National Movement, said the allegations should be thoroughly investigated and anyone who violated the law punished.

Separate video footage of torture, beatings and sexual assault of prison inmates led to street protests after it was aired on television channels opposed to Saakashvili weeks before the election last October.

The footage undermined Saakashvili's image as a reformer who improved rule of law and decreased corruption in the South Caucasus state, a conduit for energy supplies to Europe.

Saakashvili, who was swept to power in the peaceful Rose Revolution protests of 2003, must step down after a presidential election in October.

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