

## **A Deal with the Devil: United States Foreign Policy in the Balkans**

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### Abstract

Beginning with the collapse of Yugoslavia, the United States has made the seemingly comfortable policy choice of aligning itself with Muslim separatists in Bosnia and Kosovo. Copying the tactic used in Afghanistan, the US and its allies worked with Islamic fundamentalists by training and arming mujahedeen fighters in their resistance struggle against the Serbs. In doing so, the West opened the door for radical Islam to enter Europe. Just as with Afghanistan, the war ended and the mujahedeen have turned their attention on the United States and its allies. Bosnia is currently a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalist activity and the “independent” nation of Kosovo is a failing state home to domestic and international terrorist groups. Multiple terrorist attacks in the United States including 9/11 have ties to the Balkans. Because of these US foreign policy choices the terrorist threat is no longer just found in Iraq or Afghanistan, but right in the very heart of Europe. To prevent the situation from growing even worse it is critical that the US learns from these mistakes and immediately stops supporting its Islamist allies in the Balkans.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Balkans, Kosovo, Bosnia, 9/11, KLA, Separatists

### **Introduction**

Beginning with the collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the United States has made what appeared to be sound and logical foreign policy choices in the Balkans. Washington’s choice of aligning itself with Bosnian Muslims against Russian-allied Serbs in Bosnia seemed a natural international relations decision at the time. Much the same, it seemed practical when the United States openly supported Muslim Albanian separatists in the Serbian province of Kosovo. While these foreign policy choices were comfortable at the time, they were not necessarily the best decisions in the long term. Despite Serbia’s close ties to Russia, the Cold War was over and Serbia posed no threat to the United States. The same cannot be said for those comprising the growing Islamic fundamentalists in the former Yugoslavia. Much as US support of the mujahedeen in Afghanistan came back to haunt us on 9/11, the very same threat is emerging with the rise of radical Islam in the Balkans. From the 9/11 hijackers who were in Bosnia prior to the attacks to recent plots by ethnic Albanians to commit terrorist attacks in the United States, we can clearly see an emerging threat. By supporting Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo against Serbia, the United States has alienated a potential ally in the global fight against terrorism and at the same time assisted the growth of radical Islam in the Balkans which poses a future threat to Europe and the United States.

### **Bosnia: Radical Islam's Entry into Europe**

By 1993, the collapse of Yugoslavia had spiraled out of control with the conflict spilling into Bosnia. A three-way war was raging between Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Serbs with even greater carnage than in Croatia. The Bosnian Muslims rallied around their leader, Alija Izetbegovic, who called for an independent Bosnia. Izetbegovic was heralded by the West as a moderate Muslim who they could work with. The reality was quite different, however. *The Balkan Research Centre Members Brief* notes that in 1970 Izetbegovic published the *Islamic Declaration* which called for "a fully-fundamentalist Muslim state in Bosnia without scope for non-Muslim institutions or any division between religion, politics, and economics" (Balkan Research Centre Members Brief, 1992). The so-called "moderate" Izetbegovic wrote the following in his book, "... The first and foremost of such conclusions is surely the one on the incompatibility of Islam and non-Islamic systems. There can be no peace or coexistence between the "Islamic faith" and non-Islamic societies and political institutions" (Balkan Research Centre Members Brief, 1992)

The *Islamic Declaration* was indeed a call to action to create a Muslim state in the heart of Europe. It was republished in 1990 and distributed to try and foment Islamic fundamentalism throughout Bosnia. While it was the most famous of Izetbegovic's works, he has a long history of embracing radical Islam. The *BRC Members Brief* also notes, "Izetbegovic was arrested in 1946, for his significant participation in founding the Muslim journal MUDZAHID. He spent the next three years in jail for promoting hatred" (Balkan Research Centre Members Brief, 1992). The report also notes, "Izetbegovic was arrested in 1983 for activities against the state. As the chief defendant, he was sentenced to fourteen years. In 1988, he was released after less than six years of prison" (Balkan Research Centre Members Brief, 1992). All these activities led up to the war in Bosnia and Izetbegovic's ties to terrorist groups and the states that sponsor them.

As the fighting grew worse, the international community responded by deploying UN peacekeepers. This response was initially intended to be impartial but it was anything but. NATO airstrikes soon targeted Serb positions around Bosnian-Muslim Sarajevo and the United States and its allies were covertly training the Bosnian Army (Chossudovsky, 2001). Despite 1991's UN Resolution 713 which banned all arms imports to Yugoslavia, the US did nothing to stop the shipments of Iranian arms flowing into Bosnia. O'Neill observes, "Between 1992 and 1996 Iran illegally armed the Bosnian Muslims in the former Yugoslavia, flying in military advisers and mujahedin fighters to take on the Serbs" (O'Neill, 2004). This practice by Iran was hardly covert as O'Neill reports Iran was, "...using Boeing 747s to fly weapons, ammunition, anti-tank rockets, communications equipment, uniforms and helmets to Zagreb airport" (O'Neill, 2004). He estimates that by the end of 1993, approximately 30,000 soldiers were armed by Iran and Turkey.

The American position was simply to ignore these shipments at first, however, in 1994 everything changed. University of Amsterdam Professor Cees Wiebes asserts that beginning in March 1994, the Clinton Administration "gave a green light to the arms supplies from Iran to Croatia" (Wiebes, 2002). Considering this is the time when Croats and Bosnian Muslims stopped fighting against one another to unite against the Serbs, it is clear that Iran was directly arming Bosnian Muslims. Wiebes has a detailed knowledge of these allegations because he was tasked by the Dutch government to investigate the role of Western intelligence and security services in Bosnia following the Srebrenica massacre. This inquiry included looking into allegations of secret arms supplies to Bosnian Muslim forces. Aldrich describes the relations in wartime Bosnia

as a "...secret alliance between the Pentagon and radical Islamist groups from the Middle East designed to assist the Bosnian Muslims - some of the same groups that the Pentagon is now fighting in 'the war against terrorism'" (Aldrich, 2002).

Similarly, Cox cites a US House Republican policy committee statement given on April 26, 1996 which reports, "eight flights a month packed with thousands of tons of arms and ammunition either originating in Iran or purchased and shipped with Iranian backing" landed in Zagreb, destined for Bosnia. Even more alarming is the section of the report that notes Iran, "stationed from 3,000 to 4,000 revolutionary guards [mujahedin] in Bosnia" (Cox, 1996). Furthermore, the report asserts,

It was widely rumored in 1994 that Iran was skirting the U.N. arms embargo on the former Yugoslavia to supply the Muslim-led government and army of Bosnia with arms. As Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Arlen Specter stated, 'There was no secret that the shipments were taking place. The secret was the U.S. involvement, the secret conduct that was different from the open policy' (Cox, 1996).

Apparently, the secret allowance of arms shipments from Iran was not even revealed to the CIA. Cox reports, "The Administration withheld the truth from Congress, the American people, the press, our allies, and even the Central Intelligence Agency, which learnt of the covert action through its own independent intelligence activities" (Cox, 1996). It would seem that while the Clinton Administration publicly stated that no more arms should be shipped into Yugoslavia they turned a blind eye while Iran got a foothold in the heart of Europe.

There are no exact numbers of the foreign-born mujahedeen who served in Bosnia. Estimates range from 400 to over 4,000 depending on who is asked. Chossudovsky cites a Congressional report by the Republican Party Committee (RPC) which states that the Iranian forces included the elite Iranian Revolutionary Guards and VEVAK intelligence service (Chossudovsky, 2001). Despite this lack of a specific number, it is clear that they played a major part in the fighting in Bosnia, so much that Richard Holebrook is quoted as once stating, "I think the [Bosnian] Muslims wouldn't have survived without this help'" (O'Neill, 2003).

Chossudovsky cites a similar report by the London-based *International Media Corporation*. The report observes,

Reliable sources report that the United States is now [1994] actively participating in the arming and training of the Muslim forces of Bosnia-Herzegovina in direct contravention of the United Nations accords. US agencies have been providing weapons made in ... China (PRC), North Korea (DPRK) and Iran. The sources indicated that ... Iran, with the knowledge and agreement of the US Government, supplied the Bosnian forces with a large number of multiple rocket launchers and a large quantity of ammunition. These included 107mm and 122mm rockets from the PRC, and VBR-230 multiple rocket launchers ... made in Iran. ... It was [also] reported that 400 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (Pasdaran) arrived in Bosnia with a large supply of arms and ammunition (Chossudovsky, 2001).

In addition, Chossudovsky cites a 1997 Congressional report by the Republican Party Committee which coincides with the report by the *International Media Corporation*. The report bluntly states,

Perhaps most threatening to the SFOR mission - and more importantly, to the safety of the American personnel serving in Bosnia - is the unwillingness of the Clinton Administration to come clean with the Congress and with the American people about its complicity in the delivery of weapons from Iran to the Muslim government in Sarajevo.

That policy, personally approved by Bill Clinton in April 1994 at the urging of CIA Director-designate (and then-NSC chief) Anthony Lake and the U.S. ambassador to Croatia Peter Galbraith, has, according to the Los Angeles Times (citing classified intelligence community sources), "played a central role in the dramatic increase in Iranian influence in Bosnia" (Chossudovsky, 2001).

This information echoes a 2002 Dutch government study of the events surrounding the fall of Srebrenica which reports, "On 4 September 1992, the CIA discovered an Iran Air Boeing 747 at Zagreb airport. Subsequent investigation revealed that the jumbo jet was loaded with weapons, ammunition, anti-tank rockets... destined for the ABiH in Bosnia" (Srpksa-mreza.com, 2004). The Dutch investigators' report asserts that this smuggling of arms from Iran to Croatia, and from Croatia to Bosnia was done behind the back of the CIA and furthermore notes that classified CIA documents report that Croatian Ambassador Peter Galbraith was suspected of his involvement in this weapons smuggling scheme by the CIA itself (Srpksa-mreza.com, 2004). The report states, "In February or March 1994, he [Galbraith] spoke with his CIA station chief about the option of secret arms supplies to Bosnia, to which... .. the United States would turn a blind eye. The station chief reported this immediately to his headquarters" (Srpksa-mreza.com, 2004).

Following the war, many of the foreign-born mujahedeen remained in Bosnia. Again, estimates range in the hundreds yet it is a fact that they remain in Bosnia today and continue to recruit others to their cause. Aldrich observes that following the Dayton Accords, "The CIA's main opponents in Bosnia were now the mojahedin fighters and their Iranian trainers – whom the Pentagon had been helping to supply months earlier" (Aldrich, 2002). A recent raid near the Bosnian town of Brcko on February 2, 2010 is testament to mujahedeen presence to this day. The raid was conducted by 600 state police and security agents on the village of Gornja Maoca. The town is described as being an isolated village where Sharia law is practiced and the laws of Bosnia and Hercegovina do not apply. Serbian news agency B-92 reports that street signs are in Arabic, and "Most of the homes there fly black Islamic flags, and the children study according to the education system of the country of Jordan, reports said" (B-92, 2010). Police carried out the raid to determine the identities of persons who pose a threat to the security of Bosnia, according to the report. Police detained ten Wahhabis in this operation and seized computers, cell phones, and hunting weapons (B-92, 2010). It is difficult to imagine such a village in Europe, yet this is but one example.

If the war in Bosnia opened the door for radical Islam to infiltrate Europe, the war reconstruction effort ripped it off its very hinges. A host of Islamic charities and NGOs were specifically designed to recruit terrorists and spread Islamic fundamentalism. Deliso cites a May 2005 report from the Naval Postgraduate School which reports that since 1992, "... the main supporters of Salafi ideas [in Bosnia] were the following relief agencies – High Saudi Committee, al-Haramain Foundation, and the Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage (Jam'iyyat Ihya' al-Turah al-Islami)" (Deliso, 2005). The amount of money pouring into Bosnia from these charities is staggering. *ISN* reports that "More than US\$350 million in donations from Islamic countries were sent through the charity's account in the Austrian Die Erste Osterreich Bank between 1992 and 1995, with around half used to finance the Bosnian government" (ISN, 2009).

## **Kosovo: Making a Deal with the Devil**

Bosnia is not the only example of how US foreign policy assisted Islamic fundamentalism to spread in Europe. The case of Kosovo is another example where the US government aligned itself with a side in a conflict that will have negative long term implications. In this case, the US openly supported the ethnic Albanian terrorist organization known as the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) in their fight against Serbs in 1999. Beginning in 1996, ethnic Albanian separatists began a campaign of terrorism against the Serbian population of Kosovo. Human Rights Watch reports, "In early 1996, the first organized violence took place against Serbian civilians and police. Although individual attacks had occurred before then, the first coordinated attack occurred on February 11, when grenades were thrown at the gates of Serbian refugee camps in Pristina, Mitrovica, Pec, Suva Reka, and Vucitrn" (HRW, 2001). The KLA committed assassinations of Yugoslavian police in targeted ambushes, and kidnappings and murders of Serbian government officials as well as non-Albanian civilians.

The United States initially recognized the KLA was a terrorist organization and understood its ties to drug trafficking and radical Islam. Former Canadian Ambassador to the Yugoslavia, James Bissett observes, "As early as 1998, the U.S. State Department listed the KLA as a terrorist organization financing its operations with money from the international heroin trade and funds supplied from Islamic countries and individuals, including Osama bin Laden" (Bissett, 2001). Similarly, Human Rights Watch cites a 1998 statement by President Clinton's special representative, Robert Gelbard. They note,

During a press conference in Pristina on February 22, he declared that 'the UCK [KLA] is a terrorist group by its actions. I used to be responsible for counter-terrorist policy in the American government. I know them when I see them' (HRW, 2001).

Despite this, the US aligned itself with the KLA in an attempt to oust Yugoslavian president Slobodan Milosevic.

Because the KLA was certainly a terrorist group is not to say that Yugoslavian forces were free from any guilt. There are multiple reports of heavy-handed responses by the Yugoslav police and military which resulted in numerous civilian casualties. It was for this reason that the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission was sought to be implemented in Kosovo, to which Milosevic conceded. According to Human Rights Watch, Holbrook and Milosevic agreed to, "...a cease-fire, NATO air surveillance to verify compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1199, and the deployment of an observer mission from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) called the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM)" (HRW, 2001). Despite the presence of the mission, the KLA continued to attack Serbs in hopes for an excessive retaliation in front of international monitors. Current Kosovo Prime Minister and founder of the KLA Hashim Thachi is quoted by Kuperman openly admitting that they [the KLA] knew civilians would be killed. Thachi stated, "We knew full well that any armed action we undertook would trigger a ruthless retaliation by Serbs against our people... We knew we were endangering civilian lives, too, a great number of lives" (Kuperman, 2008). Human Rights Watch observes one such attack against Serb civilians occurred on December 12, 1998 when several KLA members murdered six teenagers inside a café in the city of Pec (HRW, 2001). Non-Albanian men, women, and children continued to be victims of the KLA as well as ethnic Albanians viewed as collaborators to Yugoslavia.

The United States and its allies sought a peace agreement between Serbs and Albanians in Rambouillet, France in February, 1999. The agreement was viewed by some as designed to

fail (Iskenderov, 2010). Under the terms, Milosevic would have to yield Yugoslavia's sovereignty and allow NATO full and uninhibited access to all of Yugoslavia, not just Kosovo. Furthermore, Kosovo would be allowed to have a referendum on independence within 3 years. These terms were clearly unacceptable to Milosevic and he naturally refused to sign the accord. Iskenderov quotes Former Yugoslavian Vice President Momir Bulatovic:

In Rambouillet we were asked to agree to the deployment of NATO forces in Kosovo and to allow them access to all of the Yugoslavian territory. According to a document which looked like an ultimatum, all our expressways, railroads, air space, and installations were to be used by NATO free of charge and without any limitations. All NATO servicemen were to be exempt from our laws and or any criminal responsibilities. All the decision-making was to be left to the commander of the NATO contingent. The document was formulated so that no sane individual could ever sign it (Iskenderov, 2010). Arguably, by the time the Rambouillet accords were started, the United States and its NATO allies had already decided to back the KLA as a way to topple Milosevic.

Following 78 days of NATO bombing without a change in Milosevic's policy, a peace agreement was reached. Ironically, the agreement included the removal of the very two points that led to bombing in the first place. First, there would be no referendum on Kosovo's independence because Kosovo was recognized as being an integral part of Yugoslavia. Second, there would be no NATO occupation of the entire territory of Yugoslavia, instead, NATO forces would be allowed in Kosovo only. These were the points that Milosevic wanted all along. As the Yugoslav Army and security forces withdrew, NATO was supposed to fill the void. Instead, the KLA emerged from the mountains and began a campaign of terror against the civilian population. Serbs, Roma, and Albanians that were perceived as collaborators were kidnapped or executed and thousands of homes were looted and burned. Judah reports, "Many KLA men, including some commanders, were now involved in revenge attacks against Kosovo Serbs. Some commanders talked openly of their 'zero tolerance' policy, which meant that they would not allow any Serbs to remain in their areas" (Judah, 2000). The KLA became the de facto government (Judah, 2000). KLA terrorist leaders removed their combat fatigues and donned expensive Italian suits as they took various government offices around Kosovo. KLA leaders Agim Ceku, Ramush Haradinaj, and Hashim Thachi all were now running the provisional government. Their alliance with heroin traffickers and Islamic fundamentalists was now free to expand. Kosovo became a failing state and virtual black hole where criminal activity abounded and provided a safe-haven for terrorists. This opinion was succinctly stated by Michael Radu in a *Tanjug* article entitled, "U.S. expert: Kosovo is 'black hole' in center of Balkans." *Tanjug* quotes,

Kosovo, with its semi-educated population and criminal armed formations, is a 'black hole' in the center of the Balkans, which reminds me of Chechnya in the 1995-1999 period or Pridnestrovye in the 1990s," said Radu, who is the co-chairman of the Center on Terrorism and Counterterrorism at the Philadelphia-based Foreign Policy Research Institute (Tanjug, 2007).

In addition to organized crime, various charities from the Middle East began to pour millions of dollars into Kosovo right after NATO occupation. Today, the money from the Islamic charities is visible everywhere. While one does not see many new schools or hospitals there are hundreds of new mosques sprouting up all around Kosovo. The Middle Eastern influence is visible in the physical appearance of many Kosovo Albanian youth. Singh asserts that foreign Wahhabis are paying local Albanians a monthly stipend ranging from €100-300 to dress in

“visible signs of Islam” (Singh, 2007). Singh believes that the foreign Wahhabis goal is to replace the “moderate Islam in Kosovo” by funding “Islamic studies” trips for youth. He explains that young Kosovo Muslims are sent to places like Saudi Arabia and Egypt for six months to one year, and notes, “upon returning back in Kosovo [they] sport Islamic beards and robes instead of their jeans” (Singh, 2007). Today, these young people can be observed in public places like the sport arena parking lot in Pristina. Every Friday afternoon one will see anywhere from 75 – 150 youths gather for lectures and sermons by various Wahhabi imams (Unpublished Material, 2010). One will immediately note the stark contrast the congregants with their short pants and long beards versus Western-looking teenagers in the nearby shopping mall.

Deliso reports that Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Emirates are reported to have the most amounts of NGOs at work in Kosovo (Deliso, 2005). Given that Iran remains a state-sponsor of terrorism and the fundamentalist nature of Saudi Arabia, there can be little doubt that these NGOs are fronts for terrorist organizations. It has been reported that the UN turned a “blind eye” to many charities suspected of having ties to terrorism (Deliso, 2005). Deliso interviewed former OSCE security Chief Thomas Gambill who reported that the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS) was one such group operating in Kosovo. Gambill reports that by “ignoring the group’s presence in Kosovo, the international authorities continue to allow a key source of terrorist funding and logistical organization to operate unhindered” (Deliso, 2005). Gambill states that he had information on these kinds of terrorist groups in Kosovo going back to 2001 but the US Department of State and NATO were not interested. He recalls that by, “ignoring the group’s presence in Kosovo, the international authorities continue to allow a key source of terrorist funding and logistical organization to operate unhindered” (Deliso, 2005). According to Deliso, the RIHS is a Kuwait-based organization that spans many Muslim countries. They are reported to target young, poor, and disaffected people and sell their Salafi or Wahhabi brand of Islam. He reports that their mission is “carried out through large-scale mosque-building, financial incentives for converts, and attempts to alienate the young from the established traditions and political processes of their home countries” (Deliso, 2005). Deliso asserts that Kosovo is a perfect place for RIHS to set up because they have a,

...special interest in Islamic or partially Islamic states where a certain level of turbulence prevails, where stagnant economies and governmental corruption can be assailed from a broadly populist viewpoint – and, notably, where there is no historical tradition of Arab Salafi worship (Deliso, 2005).

Clearly Kosovo, Bosnia, and Albania meet the criteria for the preferred recruiting grounds for RIHS, the High Saudi Committee, and al-Haramain Foundation.

It is interesting to note that while RIHS chapters in Pakistan and Afghanistan were blacklisted by the US, Bank of England, and UN as early as 2002, there was never an issue raised as to why they were not given attention in Kosovo. Deliso observes that aside from Afghanistan and Pakistan, RIHS has been working with “Chechen émigré jihadis in Azerbaijan and with indigenous terrorist groups in Bangladesh, in both cases intending to establish a strictly Islamic government through violent upheaval” (Deliso, 2005). In each of these cases, Deliso notes that RIHS has a three-part strategy. First, they establish a presence in a country, like they did in Albania in the early 1990s. Second, they begin to transform the state by radicalizing parts of the population to Salafi Islam through missionaries and mosque construction, as they did in Azerbaijan. The third step is to destabilize the state through terrorism (Deliso, 2005). One such example is the series of 500 bombings across Bangladesh which occurred on August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2005, courtesy of RIHS.

### Attacks Narrowly Averted

Steps 1 and 2 are already underway, and it is clearly a matter of time until step 3 comes to fruition. In fact, several terrorist attacks with ties to Kosovo have already been thwarted, suggesting that Kosovo is already in the third stage of RIHA's planning. One such attack was the planned assault by Kosovo Albanians on Ft. Dix in New Jersey (CNN, 2007). Curiously, most US media outlets only reported that the attackers were citizens of the "former Yugoslavia" rather than admit most were from the US-supported breakaway province of Kosovo. The reality is that 4 out of the 6 persons arrested were ethnic Albanians from Kosovo. CNN reported, "The U.S. Attorney's Office said the three brothers involved, all with the last name Duka, were born in the former Yugoslavia and are illegally residing in the United States. It identified them as Eljvir, 23, Shain, 26, and Dritan, 28..." (CNN, 2007). CNN was quick to point out the exact ethnicity of the two non-ethnic Albanians, however. "The other three men charged are Mohamad Ibrahim Shnewer, 22, of Cherry Hill, New Jersey, a U.S. citizen born in Jordan who is employed as a taxicab driver in Philadelphia; Serdar Tatar, 23, of Philadelphia, born in Turkey, whose last known employment was at a 7-Eleven; and Agron Abdullahu, 24, of Buena Vista Township, born in the former Yugoslavia..." (CNN, 2007).

Another attack recently uncovered was planned in Novi Pazar, Serbia, and across the border in Kosovo. A group of Muslim Serbian citizens planned a series of attacks on several sports arenas in the Novi Pazar area all set to explode during soccer matches (Balkan Insight, 2009). *Balkan Insight* reports that these attacks were to occur between May and September, 2007. The group included a Kosovo Albanian named Bajram Aslani who belongs to the terrorist group Abu Bekir Sadik. Aslani, a resident of Kosovska Mitrovica, was recorded through Serbian police wiretaps plotting the attacks and supplying the necessary weapons (Unpublished Material, 2010).

Adis Muric, Nedžad Bulic and Enes Mujanovic from Novi Pazar and Bajram Aslani from Mitrovica were convicted of planning the terrorist attacks in 2009 and all were handed heavy sentences (Balkan Insight, 2009). Bulic and Aslani were tried in absentia and still remain free. The most disturbing part of this is that Bajram Aslani currently lives in his family home in Kosovska Mitrovica despite having an international arrest warrant. Because of the territorial dispute between Serbia and the separatist government of Kosovo, authorities in Pristina refuse to arrest and extradite Aslani to serve his sentence. Serbian authorities handed over all evidence of this case that included absolute proof of Aslani's guilt in attempts to gain international cooperation from the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX). This evidence included official transcripts of telephone calls between Aslani and the other members where the plot was discussed, as well as seized photographs which show the group at Aslani's house in Mitrovica with a variety of weapons (Personal knowledge, 2010).

*Balkan Insight* reports, "According to Judge Miran Ranic, the group was training to fly airplanes and made links with supporters in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Albania, Georgia and Syria" (Balkan Insight, 2009). Furthermore, the amount of weapons the group had was extremely powerful. The report also notes, According to the verdict, the group had "militant power equivalent of an infantry division of 30-40 people" and was capable of terrorist actions. The verdict also said the group had the ability to fight with anti-infantry and anti- armored [weapons] as well as take control of the main traffic points around Novi Pazar. During the arrests, two members were found to be carrying CDs with footage of US soldiers being killed in



Afghanistan and Iraq, Russian soldiers in Chechnya, as well as footage of suicide bombers and other material extolling the virtues of jihad (Balkan Insight, 2009).

All of this evidence should have set off alarm bells within EULEX and the Kosovo government, yet Aslani remains free and is clearly a continuing threat. His name was linked to a recent terror plot that was foiled in North Carolina that involved another Kosovo Albanian named Hysen Sherifi (Personal knowledge, 2010).

In July, 2009 the FBI foiled a domestic terror plot in Willow Spring, North Carolina that included a Kosovo Albanian and a Bosnian Muslim (Kuci, 2009). According to the article in *Balkan Insight*, “Prosecutors claim Sherifi visited Kosovo in July 2008 ‘to engage in violent jihad’, before returning to the US in April 2009 to raise ‘funds and personnel to support the mujihadeen’” (Kuci, 2009). Also arrested in the group was Bosnian Muslim named Anes Subasic, like Sherifi, an immigrant to the United States.

Following these arrests, the FBI provided information to the Kosovo Police who arrested four more Kosovo Albanians for terrorism-related charges in the city of Prizren. The August, 2009 arrests included one ethnic Albanian with American citizenship. The Kosovo news agency RTK reports, “Police managed to handcuff Bekim Kazi-originally from Dibra (Macedonia) and also an American citizen together with Shaban Dili, Bajram Berisha and Ilaz Islami-all three Kosovo citizens” (RTK, 2009). RTK also notes that group was identified as Wahhabis and they were arrested with automatic weapons and explosives (RTK, 2009). One can only speculate if this group had ties to Bajram Aslani or Hysen Sherfi. The fact remains that these incidents are indeed occurring and there is a huge pool for radicals to recruit from given the poverty, extreme unemployment, and Europe’s youngest population who have absolutely nothing to do.

The list of radical Balkan Muslims arrested for plotting terrorist attacks is a long one. In October, 2007 two Bosnian jihadists were arrested with explosives when they attempted to attack the US Embassy in Vienna (Imm, 2007). Several more arrests in Bosnia in 2008 were of the same nature. *International Analyst Network’s* Michaletos reports,

Already in March 2008 a group of 5 radical Wahhabis were arrested near Sarajevo who had a large amount of armaments and were connected with extremist groups. In May 2008 another group of 10 people were arrested because of their connection with illegal arms contraband from Bosnia to Croatia and to Central Europe. Most of them were war veterans that fought with the Muslim federation in the mid-90’s and were also related with the Mujahedeens who ventured from the Middle East and North Africa (Michaletos, 2008).

### **The 9/11 Connection**

The recent arrests of terror suspects in North Carolina, New Jersey, and Kosovo are only some of many. Going back to the attacks September 11, 2001 we can see that some of the hijackers had ties to the former Yugoslavia. Consider the case of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks: *ADN Kronos* reports that Mohammed had a Bosnian passport given to him after the war in Bosnia. Mohammed reportedly came to Bosnia in 1995 under the guise of being an aid worker for Egyptian Relief (AND Kronos, 2009). Much like many other mujahedeens in Bosnia, Mohammed never left following the conclusion of hostilities.

Bozinovich interviews author and Balkan terrorism expert Jürgen Elsässer, who asserts that there were five 9/11 conspirators who had spent time in Bosnia. When asked about the two 9/11 jihadists trained in Bosnia, Elsässer states,

Not two, but five: Al Hazmi and Al Midhar (Plane Nr.3/Pentagon), Mohammed Atta (Plane Nr. 1/WTC) and the "Masterminds" Binalshibh and Khalid Sheikh Mohamed. Al Hazmi and Al Midhar were from Jan. 2000 until 9/11 under surveillance of US-Secret Services as was Atta's flat in Hamburg-Harburg. Binalshibh and Sheikh Mohamed are in US-custody since their arrest in 2002/2003 and are the main witnesses for the Pentagon-Version of 9/11, voluntarily or involuntarily they also work for US-interests. These people killed 3000 people, mostly Americans, but it is likely that they also worked for US secret services (Bozinovich, 2005).

Osama bin Laden also has ties to the Balkan Peninsula. Before the collapse of Yugoslavia he spent time in training camps in Albania and has been sited in Bosnia and linked to the KLA (Bozinovich, 2005). In the interview, Elsässer observes that bin Laden was actually observed in Bosnia on two separate occasions by a German journalist. He notes, "Renate Flottau, Spiegel-correspondent for the Balkans, saw Bin Laden 1993/94 at least two times WITH HER OWN EYES in Izetbegovic's palace and even spoke with him. She confirmed it to me personally. She said Izetbegovic didn't like Bin Laden, but needed him" (Bozinovich, 2005).

Other top Al Qaeda figures have ties to Kosovo as well. Pascali cites *Novosti* reports which state that the brother of Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Zaiman, is running terrorist camps under NATO protection in the U.S. zone in Kosovo. The 1999 report asserts,

A training camp of Albanian militants functions near the village of Ropotovo, close to Kosovska Kamenica, in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo, which is controlled by the American force, sources from the Russian peacekeeping force in Kosovo reported on [Oct. 16]. According to [the sources], the camp is now training 50 Afghan and Algerian mujahideen, led by Zaiman Zawahiri. He is reportedly the brother of one of the closest associates of international terrorist Osama bin Laden. This camp prepares militants for terrorist formations in Kosovo and Macedonia. Their 'instructors' are former [ethnic] Albanian officers who, in 1991-92, deserted from the Yugoslav Army (Pascali, 2001).

## The Emerging Crisis

In addition to the jihadist threat in Kosovo there is another terrorist threat emerging. One of the successors to the KLA is the Albanian National Army (also known as ANA or its Albanian equivalent, AKSH), an ultra-nationalist terror group that wants to create a "Greater Albania" by uniting all land inhabited by Albanians into one nation (Refworld, 2008). This includes parts of southern Serbia, southern Montenegro, northern Greece, and northern Macedonia. Albanian terrorists have already fought terrorist campaigns in Serbia and Macedonia, and continue to commit sporadic terrorist attacks in Serbia's Presevo valley. Elsässer notes that the ANA has morphed into several groups, one of which has ties to Al Qaeda (Bozinovich, 2005). Gambill, too, notes this and reports, "a branch of the AKSH... has hooked up with the fundies [Islamic fundamentalists] in the southern tip of Kosovo, the Dragash area between Albania and Macedonia" (Deliso, 2005).

The ANA has continued the terrorist tactics of the KLA since the end of the war in 1999 throughout Kosovo. In early 2003, the ANA unleashed a bombing campaign across Kosovo. On April 12, 2003 ANA took responsibility for the bombing of a railway bridge in the Serbian populated town of Zvecan (KIM Info Service, 2005). In the following days, the UN declared the ANA a terrorist organization as defined by UNMIK regulations and outlawed it throughout Kosovo (Personal knowledge, 2010). It remains a crime to hold ANA membership throughout

Kosovo yet this organization continues to have a strong presence in Kosovo and remains a threat to Serbs and other non-Albanians as well as the international community working in Kosovo.

The fighting that is emerging between Islamic fundamentalists and Christians is not the only danger, however. The fight to establish a fundamentalist Islamic state is already underway in Bosnia and Kosovo. Deliso cites an alarming statistic from academic Isa Blumi. He reports, "In the immediate postwar period... the Saudi Joint Committee for the Relief of Kosovo and Chechnya (SJCRKC) spent 4 million Saudi Riyals (about \$500,000) to bring 388 Wahhabi missionaries to indoctrinate Kosovars" (Deliso, 2005). Schwartz, too, has written several articles detailing "Kosovo's second war" – meaning that between radical and moderate Islam inside Kosovo (Schwartz, 2009). He has detailed several vicious attacks against moderate mullahs and imams at the hands of Wahhabis. One such assault turned into a riot inside a mosque on January 9, 2009. Nine people were arrested including two men with the typical short pants and long beards typical of Wahhabis. Schwartz reports the victim in this case, Mullah Osman Musliu, appeared on the Kosovo daily newspaper *Express* with "...a black eye and bandaged hand, he said he doubted that Serbia had damaged Kosovo as badly as could Wahhabi infiltration" (Schwartz, 2009). Schwartz reports several other similar attacks on moderate imams and mullahs that all occurred within the same time period, indicating this is a growing trend and not an isolated incident.

## **MPRI**

Throughout the fighting in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia there has been one common factor linked to Islamic fundamentalists known as Military Professional Resources Incorporated (MPRI). The American firm MPRI is an L3 subsidiary and subcontractor for the Pentagon that consists of former military personnel who become advisors to foreign groups (Gordon, 2003). According to their own website, MPRI states that it "...serves the national security needs of the US government, selected foreign governments, international organizations and the private sector" (MPRI, 2010).

It was MPRI who advised, trained, and armed mujahedeen in Bosnia (Bozinovich, 2005). The same group assisted bringing these jihadists to Kosovo to fight against the Yugoslavian forces, and it was the same group who advised and trained these mujahedeen in Macedonia. Elsässer asserts "MPRI sent 80 – 120 Mujahadeen into Kosovo to help KLA. This is proven" (Bozinovich, 2010). He also reports that MPRI

...took over the Arab/Iranian weapons-smuggling in 1995, helped the Mujahadeen to "liberate" Sarajevo in September 1995, took the best Mujahadeen fighters after Dayton on their own payroll, trained them with the help of Turkish army and sent them to Kosovo and later to Macedonia (Bozinovich, 2010).

Deliso also reports on MPRI's activity, this time in Macedonia, during the Albanian uprising in 2001. He asserts,

The battle of Aracinovo descended into farce when NATO evacuated armed Albanian militants, who clambered aboard the "fun bus" along with foreign mujahedin and 17 American MPRI military advisors. While the U.S. denies this covert involvement, a Dutch intelligence report from 2002 affirmed it, claiming that the EU was furious (Deliso, 2005).

Deliso cites a second report which “quotes another soldier involved, who provides details regarding not only American involvement but that of mujahedin on the Albanian side” (Deliso, 2005).

## Conclusion

The United States supported mujahedeen in Afghanistan in its fight against the Soviet Union and it is painfully apparent that our decision came back to haunt us. From the late 1990s to 2001, Al Qaeda launched a series of devastating attacks on the United States from its safe haven in Afghanistan. Much the same, the decision to support Muslim Bosnians and Albanians in the former Yugoslavia is already beginning to yield similar consequences. As O’Neill notes, “If Western intervention in Afghanistan created the Mujihadeen, Western intervention in the Balkans globalised it” (O’Neill, 2003). One can only think that had the United States partnered with Serbia in the fight against radical Islam there is a good chance that Wahhabis would not have the foothold in the Balkans they do today. Deliso asserts,

A failure to cultivate good ties with Serbian intelligence has also been a problem. Usually Serbian warnings of Islamic terrorist activities are met with suspicion by a cynical West. However, they incontestably have the experience, the knowledge, and the intelligence to make a contribution to the fight against terror – if the West really is sincere about that particular campaign (Deliso, 2005).

Humanitarian intervention has not made Bosnia an economically viable state even after 15 years of international supervision. Unemployment is endemic and ethnic tensions are still tenuous at best. Organized crime, nationalism, and religious extremism is more prevalent in Bosnia than in neighboring countries. The case is even bleaker in neighboring Kosovo, which has almost no industry or investment and has the highest unemployment rate coupled with the youngest population in Europe. Both have a Muslim-majority population (Bosnia having a slight majority while there is an overwhelming Muslim majority in Kosovo.) Over the long term there is an ever-increasing chance to see the frustration of people in these failing states turn to extreme ideologies such as Islamic fundamentalism. Given the continuing influence from terrorist-linked charities and NGOs from the Middle East there is an extremely high chance that more Muslims in the Balkans will be attracted to a Salafist ideology as they become increasingly discouraged with their living conditions at home.

Today as the United States continues to support its Muslim allies in the Balkans it ignores both past mistakes and the clear warning signs of an expanding Islamic threat. Rather than admit that Kosovo and Bosnia are failing states with strong ties to criminal and terrorist organizations it would appear that our policy will carry on with the status quo. Admitting that radical Islam is a rising threat in the Balkans would be to admit making a poor foreign policy decisions going back to the early 1990s. Instead of aiding in humanitarian missions in the short term our foreign policy has helped to create failed states in the very heart of Europe. These states which give sanctuary to Islamic fundamentalist terror groups and their criminal associates have turned into a virtual breeding ground for the radicalization of the young, poor, and jobless youth who are so common in the Balkans. A generation of European terrorists are being recruited and indoctrinated who appear every bit as “European” as the general population. We are well-aware of the threat of “White Al-Qaeda” and in this era of visa-free travel throughout Europe we have unknowingly opened the door for radical Islam to come right into our own backyard.

It is crucial that we learn from our mistakes here and weigh out the long-term versus short-term benefits of involvement in internal disputes of other nations. We must act immediately to counter this threat by engaging former rivals like Serbia who already have a long history of dealing with this the terrorist threat in Europe. We must more actively monitor the various Islamic charities and NGOs, and involve United States law enforcement and intelligence services in regional cooperation with other Balkan nations. It is no longer safe to assume that the war against international terrorism is limited to places like Damascus, Tehran, or Kabul when the threat is also found in places like Sarajevo, Pristina, and Brcko. Recent arrests of ethnic Albanian and Bosnian Muslim terrorists within the United States are evidence to this fact. Truly, the terrorist threat of Islamic fundamentalism is indeed a global one so we need to start fighting Islamic fundamentalism globally. The first step in doing this involves making sound foreign policy choices that do not alienate potential allies while aligning ourselves with potential future foes.

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