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EUROPE'S SECOND FRONT: THE RISKS AND CHALLENGES OF THE BALKAN PENINSULA'S FUNDAMENTALIST ISLAMIST ORGANIZATIONS

ABSTRACT: *The first front of the terrorist threat to Europe is sufficiently well known: second or third generation young Muslims who grew up in the European states, but are alienated from and hate their host societies, and adopted the radical ideology of political Islam. The second front – radical Islam in the western Balkans – has received less attention. There is a good reason for this: for the time being it is only a distant storm cloud on the horizon. However, it can strike without warning at any moment, like a tropical storm. This essay analyzes the origins of this threat, estimates its extent and seriousness, and recommends policies to prepare for it.*

KEYWORDS: *Salafism, jihad, Bosnia and Hercegovina, terrorism, Balkans*

ISLAM IN THE BALKANS, 14TH THROUGH 20TH CENTURIES

Well before the Ottoman conquests Islam had already made its appearance in the Balkans through immigrants and merchants from the Middle East and Central Asia. However, it became the peninsula's dominant religion only between 1352 and 1467, during the Ottoman Empire's long march to the north and west. Tradesmen, merchants, bureaucrats of the state administration, as well as proselytizing movements followed the Ottoman armies, and the population began to convert to Islam in some areas. Most conversions occurred in Albania and Bosnia, due to the diligent proselytizing work of the *mevlevi*, *kadirija* and *bektasi* Sufi schools. Conversion was slow, even though converts enjoyed some advantages: they were free of the restrictions and obligations imposed on non-Muslim subjects (mandatory dress, unequal treatment in the courts, mandatory subservience to Muslims); they did not have to pay the *jizya*, the special tax imposed only on non-Muslims, and new career opportunities (e.g. military service) opened up for them. The imperial government did not urge conversion particularly: the *jizya* was an important source of the imperial revenue, and mass conversion would have caused financial chaos.¹

Forced conversions (although they did occur sometimes) were rare: the “peoples of the book,” the Jews and Christians, were allowed to live as second-class subjects (*dhimmis*) under the empire's protection, as long as they accepted the restrictions and obligations imposed on them, and paid the *jizya*. Under the Ottoman *millet* system adherents of the various faiths enjoyed a certain personal and communal autonomy: they could practice their religion, live

¹ Bieber, F. “Muslim Identity in the Balkans before the Establishment of Nation States”. *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 28. No. 1. 2000. 13-28.

according to their own customs, and resolve their disputes in their own courts.² Disputes between litigants belonging to different faiths were adjudicated in the court of the aggrieved party's *millet* – except when a Muslim was involved: such cases were always brought to the Muslim millet's court. Only those Christians and Jews who sought their fortune beyond the confines of their village were at some disadvantage because some professions were closed to them. Nevertheless, many reached very high positions in the Empire's administration – furthermore, some positions were filled almost exclusively by Christians or Jews.

The Ottoman Empire's slow withdrawal from Europe (1800-1918) redrew the Balkan Peninsula's demographic map. The Muslim communities suffered particularly heavy losses because the new, independent nation-states that appeared in the former Ottoman provinces strove for ethnic homogeneity, and were not particularly fastidious about the methods they used to achieve it. These early "ethnic cleansing" projects were generally successful: the ratio of Muslims within the population was significantly reduced everywhere.³ In some states the discriminative policies against Muslims – especially Turks – remained in effect until the end of the 20th century.⁴

However, discrimination was not the only Muslim experience. During the decades of communist rule a more or less secular Muslim elite (physicians, engineers and other intellectuals) came into being throughout the Balkans. In the 1961 census in Yugoslavia the Muslims were allowed to declare themselves as a nationality (*narodnost*), and 10 years later as a nation (*narod*) – a concession that dangerously conflated the categories of nation and religion.⁵

THE DISSOLUTION OF YUGOSLAVIA

With the collapse of socialism, as new parties emerged, the new Muslim elites acquired a significant political role. Many of the new parties were organized on more or less openly ethnic or religious foundations, and the leadership of the Muslim parties with very few exceptions came from these Muslim/communist elites. More precisely, most of them were intellectual activists of the mass organizations of the former communist parties. For example, Ibrahim Rugova, the leading politician of the Kosovo Albanians had been the chairman of the Kosovo Writers' Association. There was one organization that did not fit this generalization:

² The largest *millets* were the Muslim, the Rumi (Orthodox Christians), the Syrian Christians, the Jewish and the three Armenians (Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical). Bieber. "Muslim Identity in the Balkans before the Establishment of Nation States".

³ Üre, P. „Immediate Effects of the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War on the Muslims of Bulgaria”. *History Studies*, Vol. 13. 153-170.; McCarthy, J. *Forced Migration and Mortality in the Ottoman Empire*. Turkish Coalition of America, 2010.; Jagodić, M. „The Emigration of Muslims from the New Serbian Regions 1877-1878”. *Balkanologie*. Vol. II. No. 2. 1998. <http://balkanologie.revues.org/265>, Accessed on 20 December 2016.

⁴ Kut, Ş. „Turks of Kosovo: What to Expect?”. sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/SuleKut.pdf, Accessed 04. May 2015.

⁵ Bringa, T. R.: "Nationality Categories, National Identification and Identity Formation in "Multinational" Bosnia". In *The Anthropology of Eastern Europe*, Vol. 11. No. 1-2. 1993. 80-90. The concepts of „nationality” and „nation” had constitutional significance in communist Yugoslavia. In very simplified terms, the nations (*Jugoslovenski narodi*) were the constituent peoples of Yugoslavia (Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, Slovenes, Montenegrins and after 1971 the Muslims), who had no homeland outside the country. The ten nationalities (Hungarians, Albanians, etc.) were the peoples whose homelands were nation-states on the borders of Yugoslavia, as well as minorities whose national origin was either indeterminate, or their numbers were very small (Greeks, Russians, Jews, etc.). There was no administrative distinction, but the nations had the right to secede from Yugoslavia, while the nationalities did not.

the Bosnian SDA (Stranka Demokratske Akcije – Party of Democratic Action) followed the pan-Islamic ideology, instead of the national-Islamic one. Its leader, Alija Izetbegović, was an active adherent of the pan-Islamic ideal; his views had landed him in Yugoslavia's prisons several times.⁶ However, even the SDA had to accommodate former communist intellectuals in order to become a significant political force. Although in the first democratic elections these parties obtained the support of a significant majority of the Muslim communities, their support was far from unequivocal. Many voters in both the urban middle class and among the rural voters still supported the former communists. For example a large proportion of the Bosnian urban elite insisted on their Yugoslav identity; many were afraid of the effects of the economic reforms, or were afraid that they would have to surrender their land to the previous owner.⁷

As a result, Islam became a vehicle of political maneuvering. Three easily recognizable trends can be identified:⁸

1. Islam, as a tool of the ethnic minority. Islam is the common denominator of an easily identifiable ethnic minority, which not only distinguishes the minority from the dominant majority, but also tightens the bond among the members of the minority. Religion is not only a spiritual guiding light, but also a symbolic resource which provides authority to the leading figures of the community and legitimizes their client-building. In this trend there are commonly tight family bonds or close friendship between the religious and political leaders. The PPD (Partia për Prosperitet Demokratik – Party of Democratic Prosperity) of the Albanians in Macedonia, the DPS (Dvizhenie za Prava i Svobodi – Movement for Rights and Liberty) of the Bulgarian Turks, and the Albanian PDS (Partia Demokratike e Shqipërisë – Democratic Party of Albania) belong to this trend.

2. Islam as a vehicle of nationalism. Radical nationalists exploited Islam to compete with the dominant party or parties within the ethnic group. This was the course the PPDSH (Partia për Prosperitet Demokratik e Shqiptarëve në Maqedoni – Party for the Democratic Prosperity of Macedonian Albanians) chose in 1996, when it ran an imam against the PPD's candidate. The Albanian PRK (Partia e Rimëkëmbjes Kombetare – Party of National Restoration) followed this course as well. Nationalist radicalization contributed to making Islam part of the national identity. At the same time, Islam became “national Islam.”

3. Islam, as the vehicle of the broader religious community. Islam is a religious community (*umma*), which is above and beyond national ties, but at the same time it is also a political project, whose goal is to Islamize the Muslims. In addition to the Bosnian SDA some smaller Islamist groups followed this ideology.

Islam became a truly significant political factor in the Balkans in the course of the civil war in Bosnia and Hercegovina. The Muslims insisted on independence but were unable to make their will prevail through parliamentary procedures. The Bosnian Croats' goal was secession from rump-Yugoslavia, and in order to achieve it they allied themselves with

⁶ Izetbegović laid out his pan-Islamic views in a concise political pamphlet in 1970. Until its Publication in Sarajevo in 1990 it had been distributed in samizdat form. Izetbegović, A. *Islamska deklaracija, Jedan program islamizacije Muslimana i muslimanskih naroda*. 1970. <http://www.bastabalkana.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Islamska-Deklaracija-knjiga-o-islamizaciji-muslimana-Alija-Izetbegovic.pdf>, Accessed on 20 December 2016.

⁷ Bougarel, X. „Islam and Politics in the Post-Communist Balkans (1990-2000)”. In Keridis, D. and Perry, Ch. (eds.) *New Approaches to Balkan Studies*. Brassey's, 2003. 345-360.

⁸ Bougarel, X. “Islam and Politics in the Post-Communist Balkans (1990-2000)”. 345-360.

the Muslims. The Bosnian Serbs insisted on Bosnia's remaining part of Yugoslavia. The Muslim-Croat alliance forced a referendum through Parliament on the question of independence (February 29-March 1 1992). The Serbs considered the referendum unconstitutional and refused to participate in it.⁹ The referendum passed with nearly 100 percent support, but with the participation of less than two-thirds of the eligible voters. In spite of the low turnout and the questionable legitimacy of the whole process, independence was declared on March 3, and international recognition and UN membership followed, respectively, in early April and late May, while Bosnian Serb and Yugoslav forces mobilized to secure Serb areas.

In addition to nationalism, the Serbs' stubbornness was also fueled by their experience of Muslim domination, which was far more recent (1941-1945) than in the rest of Europe. They wanted to avoid its repetition (which Bosnia's demographic trends would have guaranteed sooner or later) at any cost. An obstacle to a peaceful solution was the fact that the goals and pan-Islamic views of Aliya Izetbegović (the unquestionable leader of the Bosnian Muslims) had been generally known for over 20 years. During the war the international opinion makers and the press consistently described Izetbegović as committed to the idea of a multinational, secular, democratic Bosnia. However, a review of his career¹⁰ and writings makes it clear, that he saw Bosnia's future in an Islamic republic in which the adherents of other religions would be tolerated, subjugated second-class citizens.¹¹

SALAFISM, WAHHABISM

A short detour is necessary here. As it was mentioned earlier, the Muslims of the Balkans have generally followed Islam's moderate, mysticism-prone Sufi branches. However, the more austere, fundamentalist currents of Islam have also been present among them to a greater or lesser (mostly lesser) degree. These currents are generally labeled *Salafism*, after the first three generations of Muslims (*al-salaf al-salih*), who played a decisive role in the emergence and early triumphs of Islam, and with their austere lifestyle and piety showed an example to later generations of Muslims.

Fundamentalism is not a Muslim monopoly: we find it in Christianity and in Judaism, as well as in some far-Eastern religions. Fundamentalist ideologies tend to follow similar ones, are generally responses to crises in the faith, and to secular principles that threaten the faith or are incompatible with its basic tenets, and they tend to follow similar trajectories.

⁹ The Serb objections were not without merit. The Parliament of Bosnia and Hercegovina had no authority unilaterally to change the status of the republic into that of a sovereign state, since that would also change the borders of Yugoslavia, and according to the 1974 federal constitution such a change required the consent of all federal republics. Furthermore, amendments in the early 1990s to the 1974 Constitution of Bosnia and Hercegovina guaranteed the equality of the republic's constituent nations and nationalities – a principle that was violated by the way the amendment resolution was forced through parliament over the objection of the Serbian deputies.

¹⁰ Serbian sources often bring up the fact that during World War II Izetbegović not only served in the SS Handjar Division, which had been raised in Bosnia, but also recruited fellow Bosnian Muslims to serve in the division. Since Izetbegović was in his late teens during the war (he was born in August, 1925), the extent of his prowess as a fighter, and his influence as a recruiter may be debatable. See for example Joksimovich, V. "Alija Izetbegovic". <http://www.srpska-mreza.com/Yugoslavia/views/alija3.html>, Accessed on 20 December 2016. and "Ethnic Conflicts in Civil War in Bosnia – Political manipulation with term of "Genocide" Case Study: Srebrenica – Role of so called international media's Photo documentations". <http://www.balkanpeace.org/index.php?index=/content/balkans/bosnia/srebrenica/boss13.incl>, Accessed on 20 December 2016.

¹¹ A careful reading of The Islamic Declaration makes this latter point quite clear.

Fundamentalists are engaged not in a simple traditional political struggle, but in a cosmic struggle between good and evil. In order to reinforce their besieged identity in this struggle they reach back to the “bases” – the practice and doctrines of the past, when the faith (and the faithful) were still pure. In order to avoid “contamination” they often retreat from the majority population and develop a sort of counter-culture – nevertheless, they are usually not impractical dreamers. They have internalized the pragmatic rationalism of the modern world, and by refining the “bases,” they create an ideology that shows the faithful how to struggle for renewed sacralization of an increasingly skeptical world.¹² This description also applies to the majority of Islam’s Salafist currents. Most Salafists practice their faith in isolation from everyday life – and especially from politics. They may be openly contemptuous of the adherents of other faiths, their behavior may be unlawful, bullying, or annoyingly patronizing, but seldom threatening or violent.

Wahhabism – a subset of Salafism – is different. It is not just one of Islam’s many currents, but also the official ideology of Saudi Arabia – a powerful and rich state, whose government finances its propagation generously. This 18th century ideology was born in the isolated Najd region of eastern Arabia. According to its founder, Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab (1703–1792), unnecessary innovations and foreign practices had contaminated Islam. These harmful influences – especially particularly harmful Sufi practices, such as the veneration of saints – must be rooted out by violence, and the Muslims must return to the example and austere life of the Prophet and his immediate circle, in order to purify the faith. These ideas were not new: in the Middle Ages Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855), Ibn Taymiyya (1263 – 1328) and Ibn al-Qayyim (1292–1350) advocated similar doctrines, and close to Wahhab’s time strongly fundamentalist currents also appeared in India and Yemen.

The cornerstones of Wahhabist doctrine are a very strict interpretation of monotheism,¹³ the rejection of historically unwarranted innovations (e.g. theology, jurisprudence, the veneration of individuals), and a literal adherence to the guidance of the Quran and the Hadith. They follow (and wherever they can – enforce) strict code of dress and grooming (e.g. men must grow beards, women must be covered head to toe in public). They reject (and wherever they can – prohibit) modern inventions that the Quran would have banned if they had been invented in Mohammed’s time (photography, most forms of music, banking, elections, political parties, nation-states and state boundaries, laws made by men).¹⁴

Following the example of Ibn Taymiyya, Wahhab did not hesitate to label as heretics all who refused to accept his doctrines, and declare jihad against them. In turn, the religious scholars of the time outlawed Wahhab and his followers as heretics. However, Wahhab found a strong patron: in 1774 he concluded an alliance with Muhammad ibn Saud, chief of one of the Arab tribes. The combination of Wahhab’s religious legitimacy and Ibn Saud’s military prowess proved to be enduring and successful, both in peace and in wartime. By subduing or expelling the neighboring tribes the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance extended its rule over a steadily increasing area of Arabia. It organized insurgencies in the Ottoman Empire,

¹² Armstrong, K. *The Battle for God*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000. 6.

¹³ Ibn al Wahhab’s followers called themselves *al-muwahiddin* (the monotheists). Wahhabism is a label that was attached to them subsequently by others. Janková, V. “Wahhabism in the Balkans. The Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thesis”. Charles University, Prague, 2014. 46.

¹⁴ Janková. “Wahhabism in the Balkans”. 47-53.

initiated destructive campaigns into Syria and Iraq, and with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire it has become the dominant power of Arabia (and of the Arab world).¹⁵

This picture is further complicated by the existence of jihadist-Salafist and takfiri currents. They concentrate on analyses of political reality, work out strategies and practice that may be suitable for changing that reality, and consider violence the best path to "defend Islam" and to realise their goals.¹⁶ Takfiris take this ideological process to its logical conclusion: anyone who does not agree with their interpretation of Islam is either an apostate or an infidel. Although salafism has considerable traction in the Middle East, even most salafists consider the takfir ideology as going too far.¹⁷

A radicalization process that ends in worshipping unbridled violence seems to be inevitable in the fundamentalist streams of Islam. First of all, the authoritative texts (the Koran, which purports to contain the words of Allah himself, and the Haddith, which is a chronicle of Mohammed's words and deeds) provide clear guidance to all Muslims on the proper way of life. However, these old texts are easy to misunderstand – or to misinterpret. Second, in Islam religious zeal depends on individual conviction: there is no objective yardstick by which excessive zeal can be identified.¹⁸ The adherents of radical ideologies follow the holy texts in their activities and find justification for even the bloodiest atrocities in the Koran or the Haddith. The followers of the less radical streams have no ideological arguments with which to rein in the radicals. If they still try, they cannot defend against the subsequent charge of being bad Muslims, because they do not defend the faith with sufficient vigor.¹⁹ The radicalization process that ends with the acceptance and positive affirmation of unbridled violence can be observed from 7th century Kharajites, through ibn Taymiyya, the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda, to the Islamic State, whose guiding ideology is takfirism. Salafists, Wahhabists, jihadi-Salafists manage to co-exist in great discomfort; they even support each other against other currents of Islam and against what they perceive as the "Crusader's aggression" – but from time to time this "discomfort" erupts in violent showdowns.

THE BOSNIAN CIVIL WAR AND WAHHABISM

To return to the Balkans after this brief detour, during the wars that accompanied the dissolution of Yugoslavia – and especially during the civil war in Bosnia – those fundamentalist currents of Islam that have always been present were greatly strengthened at the expense of

¹⁵ Many authors – even some specialists, who ought to know better – use the terms Salafism and Wahhabism interchangeably. This is a mistake. The Salafists may wish for a dominant role of Islam in everyday life, but they generally ignore the restraints and constraints of the real world in their religious practice and do not entertain higher political ambitions that lead to militant jihad. Wahhabism, as a state ideology, cannot divorce itself from reality: in addition to religious matters, it must also support the interests of the state. Its followers are more likely to consider violence not just acceptable, but entirely justified in the defense and propagation of Islam, and in promoting Islam's dominance. Janková. "Wahhabism in the Balkans". 44-48.

¹⁶ Janková. "Wahhabism in the Balkans". 47-48.

¹⁷ Barrett, R. *The Islamic State*. New York: The Soufan Group. 2014.

¹⁸ After the death of Mohammed (632 AD) Islam divided into two main streams (the Sunni and the Shia), which subsequently further divided into countless currents. Similar schisms within the early Christian church were healed (at least temporarily) by the ecumenical councils of the 4th through 8th centuries, which imposed some unity and discipline on the various sects, and imposed constraints and restraints on the behavior of the devout. There were no similar reunification attempts in Islam.

¹⁹ Ibrahim, R. "Why 'Moderate Islam' Is an Oxymoron". *PJ Media*, 2014. 03. 26. <http://pjmedia.com/tatler/2014/03/26/why-moderate-islam-is-an-oxymoron/>, Accessed on 12 May 2015.

the more moderate Sufi creeds. Wahhabism proved to be the most successful of them all. The conditions of the Bosnian civil war created the “perfect storm” for jihadist fighters to enter Europe in significant numbers, and spread their ideology:

- The Bosnian Muslims insisted on independence and were ready to fight for it, but did not have the necessary resources. They could not obtain any financial assistance or arms in Europe, so their only option was to turn to the Muslim world – notably Saudi Arabia.
- The Serbs were ready to fight in order to prevent Muslim dominance, and turned to Yugoslavia for financial and material support. However, Yugoslavia’s international prestige was at a very low ebb, due to its war against Croatia. Russia – the Serbs’ and Serbia’s traditional protector – was too weak to exert any influence.
- Although the governments of the United States and the western European nations approved of the creation of an (ostensibly secular and multi-national) independent Bosnian state, they were not prepared to impose it by force of arms, or support it by massive arms shipments. However, they were prepared to look the other way as funds and arms flowed in from other sources. They were also prepared to use a limited military force, in order to prevent a Serbian victory.
- The Saudi government – encouraged by the fact that Bosnia’s president was the most prominent Yugoslav champion of the ideology of political Islam – made available huge sums for the creation of an independent (Islamic) Bosnian state, and supported it throughout the war.
- In the eyes of the *mujahedeen* (the jihadist fighters) Bosnia was a direct continuation of the Afghan jihad, and they flocked to the country in significant numbers to fight “in the way of Allah.”

The flow of Saudi money was crucial for Bosnia, because the government had no other revenue to finance the operation of the state’s institutions and its arms purchases. Wahhabist charity organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs) opened offices in Europe’s major cities in order to manage the money flow from the Middle East. These organizations served as the intermediaries in the purchase and transportation of weapons, as well as the recruitment and compensation of the foreign fighters.²⁰

The Muslim world contributed not only money and arms but also men to use them: foreign fighters. There is no reliable information available about their numbers. The estimates (in reality only guesses and propaganda statements) range from 300 to 6,000, but a few hard facts suggest that the higher number is more probable. The trial records of the international tribunal on war crimes in the former Yugoslavia mention units of 700 to 1,100 men, and independent subunits of 50 to 60 men; the research service of the US Congress also suggests that several thousand fighters were involved.²¹ The *mujahedeen* units were theoretically a part of the Bosnian army but in actual fact they were independent. Their role was not particularly useful from a military point of view, but their presence had a very high ideological and propaganda value. Their two most significant – and for Europe the most worrisome – contributions were proselytization among young Balkan Muslims, and the creation of a jihadist infrastructure. They built a network contact with individuals in the Wahhabist charities and foundations,

²⁰ Janková. “Wahhabism in the Balkans”. 72-73.

²¹ See for example the trial record of Rasim Delić case (IT-04-83). ICTY. Rasim Delić (IT-04-83) case transcripts. The Hague, <http://www.icty.org/case/delic/4> and Woehrel, S. “Islamic Terrorism and the Balkans”. Congressional Research Service, RL33012. Accessed on 26 July 2005.

the various national security organs, and the local Muslim communities. According to the provisions of the Dayton Agreement, which ended the war in Bosnia, the *mujahedeen* were supposed to leave the country, but many failed to do so. Some of them married local women and thus became eligible for Bosnian citizenship, others simply ignored the requirement and remained illegally. In many isolated villages the adherents of radical Islam created Wahhabist colonies, which subsequently served as recruiting stations and as sanctuaries for international jihad fighters. They also established small training camps, some of which still exist today. Throughout the western Balkans a network of mosques controlled by radical imams spread the radical ideology and served as clandestine bases for jihad fighters. A further element of this infrastructure was the network of printed press, bookstores and internet web pages. All this was financed by non-governmental organizations and charities, some of which maintained contacts with terrorist organizations or employed known terrorists.²²

Saudi money had financed the Bosnian government's operations and arms purchases during the war, and also played a decisive role in the reconstruction after the war. State organizations and private charities assisted restore damaged infrastructure, built schools, devoted a lot of resources to the reconstruction of mosques, provided relief to Muslim victims of the war, established foundations for Muslim war orphans, organized summer camps for young people, and offered scholarships to poor but talented young Muslims in the Arab world's institutions of higher learning.

But the grants, scholarships and relief payments have a price. The mosques were restored in accordance with the austere, undecorated Wahhabist style, only Wahhabist imams are employed in them, and even the religious services were changed to conform to the Wahhabist ideology. Only Wahhabist teachers teach in schools, assistance is provided only to those who follow the Wahhabist rules in dress, behavior, and in family life: women are required to wear the headscarf, and children are expected to attend religious instruction. Wahhabist ideology has also influenced the school curricula. The traditional education system of the Bosnian Muslim community (Islamska Zajednica – IZ) has suddenly met a competing, parallel program of instruction. Moreover, after the trauma of war many young people have found Salafist teachings attractive, because it offered order.²³

These developments – albeit under better cover, and to a lesser degree – have also occurred in Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania, and by the dawn of the new millennium the Salafist ideology has put down some deep roots throughout the western Balkans.²⁴ As a result the “human terrain” of the western Balkans has changed. The tolerant, peaceful and more or less secular Muslim of the Balkans – a stereotype that had some validity in the late 20th century – has given way to the intolerant, impatient, violent, jihadist-Salafist Muslim. This is no less a stereotype, and for now perhaps it has somewhat less validity than the previous

²² Deliso, Ch. *The Coming Balkan Caliphate: The Threat of Radical Islam to Europe and the West*. Praeger Security International, 2007. 10. and Bardos, G. N. „Jihad in the Balkans: The Next Generation”. *World Affairs Journal*, 2014.09-10. <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/jihad-balkans-next-generation>, Accessed on 10 September 2014

²³ „Salafist/Wahhabite Financial Support to Educational, Social and Religious Institutions”. European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, EXPO/B/AFET /FWC/2009-01/Lot4/22, June 2013. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/457136/EXPO-AFET_ET\(2013\)457136_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/457136/EXPO-AFET_ET(2013)457136_EN.pdf), Accessed on 26 Jan 2017. 12-16.

²⁴ Schwartz, S. “How Radical Islam Infiltrates Kosovo”. *The Weekly Standard*, August 30, 2012. http://www.weeklystandard.com/print/blogs/how-radical-islam-infiltrates-kosovo_651173.html?page=3, Accessed on 30 August 2012.

one, but the trend is clearly towards a more radical, more aggressive, more confrontational, expansive Islam in the Balkans.²⁵

Following the events of September 11 2001 the United States and its European allies applied pressure on the various Bosnian governments to dismantle the Salafist infrastructure, but they achieved only limited results. The authorities carried out a few spectacular raids, confiscated some weapons, explosives and Islamist propaganda materials, and arrested some jihadist fighters. But the Salafists who had infiltrated the local government structures managed to sabotage the complete removal of the infrastructure: it still exists and supports the potential terrorists of the future.

In fact, this infrastructure has grown sufficiently to warrant revisiting the question of the “Green Corridor,” a concept that came to the fore over 20 years ago. It is supposed to be an Islamist project to unite the Muslim peoples of the Balkans into a contiguous chain of Muslim-dominated political entities from Turkey to the northwest tip of Bosnia.²⁶ A look at the map shows that the western third (or maybe half) of the Green Corridor is already fairly close to realization: the Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo, Albania, the Sanjak of Novi Pazar (the Serbia-Montenegro border region), and the west and northwest of Macedonia do not form a truly contiguous strip of Muslim-dominated territory, but the gaps are small. Longer gaps exist in the rest of Macedonia and in Bulgaria – and these may prove to be difficult to close. Unifying the Muslims is not a straightforward business either: common faith may be a unifying factor, but “common” does not mean “uniform.” The success of Wahhabism notwithstanding, the Balkan Muslims still follow various currents of Islam. In addition to religious doctrine, there are several other factors (e.g. ethnicity and economy) that drive apart, rather than draw together, the various Muslim nationalities.

Whether the Green Corridor is a consciously developed and tightly controlled political design pursued by Islamist decision-makers in Ankara, Riyadh, Qatar and (more recently) Raqqa, or it is just the vague outline of a goal the *umma* should all strive for is unclear. Whether the project can be realized at all is not clear either. However, these questions are perhaps less important than the risk the project represents, and Europe’s response to the risk. The immediate results of the emergence of such a geopolitical and strategic block would be the fragmentation of the affected states, and the destabilization of an already unstable region. Sitting astride major communication routes, the block would cut Greece and Macedonia off from the rest of Europe.²⁷ And a cause for concern is that Europe’s political elite is oblivious not only to the risk the Green Corridor represents, but to the very concept itself.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS REDUX

So far the Balkan threat to Europe has only appeared indirectly, as one thread in the fabric of terrorist attacks: the perpetrators had fought in the war in Bosnia, or the attack was planned there. However, some terrorist attacks in the United States (both failed and successful ones)

²⁵ Perino, V. *L’islam in Bosnia: Da islam laico a fondamentalismo?* Torino: Università degli Studi di Torino, 2006.110-112.

²⁶ Sherman, A. “Let’s Remove the Blinkers”. *The Jewish Chronicle*, September 30, 1994.

²⁷ Milani, C. E. “Geopolitica dei musulmani nei Balcani”. *Per Aspera Ad Veritatem*, No. 4. 1996. <http://gnosis.aisi.gov.it/gnosis/Start.nsf/sommari/4>, Accessed on 20 December 2016.; Trifkovic, S. “The “Green Corridor,” Myth or Reality? Implications of Islamic Geopolitical Designs New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 187-210.

were planned and carried out by young Balkan Muslims.²⁸ Furthermore, just as Bosnia was a magnet for the jihadists from western Asia 20 years ago, so the Islamic State is attracting a steady stream of young Balkan Muslims today: there are close to 900 men from the Balkans fighting in the ranks of the Caliphate's forces.²⁹

The Balkan volunteers follow the European foreign fighters' usual career pattern, which consists of five stages:³⁰

1. In the first phase the new (but not necessarily young) Muslim decides to fight "in the way of Allah": he will participate in the jihad, but instead of carrying out insignificant acts at home, he would fight in a real war on the side of the caliphate. This motivation may be real religious fanaticism but in many cases it is just a thirst for adventure or youthful rebellion. The immediate family and friends usually learn of the decision only when the would-be jihadist is already on the way to the combat zone.

2. The second phase – travel to the combat zone – is far simpler, cheaper and less time consuming than it was to Afghanistan or Chechnya. The journey can be organized through an ordinary travel agency, especially since the publication of a detailed guide (downloadable from the internet) on how to avoid the notice of international authorities and get to the Islamic State.³¹ While *en route*, the volunteer makes contact with the recruiters of the fighting groups (often this happens through acquaintances who are already in the combat zone, or just returned from there). The group that eventually accepts him will manage his further career.³²

3. During the third phase (training and combat) the volunteer becomes an experienced jihad fighter. In the training camps team spirit develops in the callow youths, the brutality of combat tempers them, and they acquire some useful skills. Those volunteers who survive become members of an international jihadist network, and they return home with firm ideological convictions.

4. In phase four the volunteer returns to his original environment, where he is received with much respect, because he fought "in the way of Allah." Due to the prestige and credibility he has acquired in combat he can start others on the path to radicalization.

5. In the last phase the jihadist gradually turns away from the distant battlefield and begins to focus on grievances and injustice at home: the statements of politicians and opinion shapers that insult Islam, the foreign forces that support the oppression of Muslims, the prejudice against Muslims. In order to avenge these injuries he begins to plot terrorist operations at home.

²⁸ "Bosnia's Dangerous Tango: Islam and Nationalism". International Crisis Group. 2013. 02. 26. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/europe/balkans/bosnia-herzegovina/b070-bosniasdangerous-tango-islam-and-nationalism.pdf>, Accessed on 09 December 2016.; Trifkovic, S. „Balkan Blowback". *Chronicles of Culture*, 01 June 2007.; Gorin, J. „Balkan Muslim Gratitude". *FrontPageMagazine*, 2007. 05. 09. <http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=26468>, Accessed on 09 May 2007. and Deliso. *The Coming Balkan Caliphate*. 10-14.

²⁹ Byman, D. and Shapiro, J. *Be Afraid. Be A Little Afraid: The Threat of Terrorism from Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq*. Brookings Institution, 2014. 11. and Barrett, *The Islamic State*.

³⁰ Byman and Shapiro. *Be Afraid. Be A Little Afraid*, 5-8.

³¹ „Hijrah to the Islamic State: What to Packup, Who to Contact, Where to Go, Stories and More!". <https://thejihadproject.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/hijrah-to-the-islamic-state.pdf>, Accessed on 29 May 2015.

³² The Islamic State has grown out of the „terrorist" category long ago: it controls a contiguous territory with a stable population, provides state services (education system, health services), performs state functions (public administration, justice), and collects taxes. Undoubtedly the standard of these functions and services – partly as a result of Salafist ideology, and partly due to limited financial resources – is often medieval. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to label IS as a large terrorist organization with some real estate, because it is far more – and far more dangerous – than that.

The problem of the returning foreign fighters causes deep (and fully justified) anxiety in the national security, law enforcement, and anti-terrorist organizations of the western world. For one thing, the sheer number of foreign volunteers³³ is a problem even if their return home is just a slow trickle: returning individually or in small groups they have little difficulty avoiding official attention, and once they are at home, they can disappear in the Muslim communities of Europe or the United States.

Precisely these Muslim communities are a big part of the problem: uncommunicative and closed, they are huge haystacks in which the jihadists are the tiny needles. The communities welcome the returning mujahedeen with respect, they offer him sanctuary and support, and respond to the inquiries of the authorities with uncomprehending silence. In the Balkan states endemic corruption is a further protective mechanism: as little as 50 to 100 Euros may be enough to have the local authorities turn a blind eye to the returnees. This protective and permissive environment can be a hotbed for radicalization: for every returning jihadist there are fifty, or a hundred, or a thousand envious young Muslims who so far have only dreamed about fighting in the way of Allah.³⁴ They can be easily inspired (or manipulated) by stories of heroism, self-sacrifice and camaraderie. The returnees can also put their dangerous skills into the service of their dangerous ideology at any time: they can organize, motivate and train small groups of their followers for terrorist attacks, or they can themselves carry out a lone-wolf operation against which the authorities are generally powerless.

In this latter respect the Balkan returnees represent a somewhat lesser threat than the French, British or Belgians, because they cannot enter travel freely throughout Europe. This does not mean that the national security organizations of Europe, and especially those of Hungary,³⁵ do not have to pay attention to the Balkans. On the contrary: as visa requirements for citizens of the Balkan states are gradually eased the terrorist threat from the Balkans is likely to increase. Thus, Hungary, as well as the rest of Europe, has a chance, which will not last long, to prepare for the next terrorist wave – and prepare better than for the previous ones.

The first, most important – and perhaps most difficult – step of this preparation is political-ideological: the doctrines of boundless multiculturalism and political correctness must be rejected: the principles of respect for personal religious convictions and practice must be paired with the rigorous enforcement of secularism in the public sphere. Europe's political and intellectual elites must face the fact that in many cases the local Muslim communities act as the enablers of terrorists: they provide (either willingly or due to coercion) the jihadist fighters with contacts, sanctuary and local infrastructure. This does not make every Muslim a potential terrorist – indeed, such an attitude on the part of the host society would drive all Muslims into the arms of the true terrorists. However, it does mean that the deferential treatment of the Muslim communities by the national authorities must come to an end. They must be made to realize that they cannot have it both ways – they cannot claim exceptionalism based on religion and abrogate their responsibilities when members of the community commit horrendous crimes. They must become part of the national body politic, live up to their responsibilities and not only enjoy the access to public goods, but also

³³ The number of western volunteers fighting in the ranks of the Islamic State is somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000., Byman and Shapiro. *Be Afraid. Be A Little Afraid*, 9., 11.

³⁴ Byman and Shapiro, *Be Afraid. Be A Little Afraid*. 9-11.

³⁵ Due to the country's geographic proximity to the Balkan states, as well as to Muslim (Ottoman) suzerainty in the 16th and 17th centuries Hungary is likely to become a target of Islamist terrorists sooner or later.

accept the burdens of citizenship, cooperate with law enforcement and cast out from themselves those who attack the host society.

Actually, the uncritical application of multiculturalism and political correctness has been more of a European than a Hungarian (or east European) problem. In the first place, most Hungarians, and perhaps most east Europeans, are deeply sceptical of these doctrines or reject them outright, and in the second, the Muslim communities are fairly small in these countries. However, as member states of the European Union, they cannot entirely disregard the views of the political and intellectual elite in the rest of Europe.

Immediately after this – and closely coupled with the first step – come legal and administrative steps. Strengthening the immigration control and border protection mechanisms on the periphery of the European Union, as well as within the member states, is only part of this picture. A crucially important part is a legal review: do the laws allow or hinder the swift neutralization of terrorists (whether foreign-born or home-grown, whether they operate as part of a team or as lone wolves)? Does the court system deal with terrorism offenses as strictly as society expects?

In asymmetric conflicts strategic communication is one of the most important factors – far more important, than battlefield successes. The non-state opponent understands this much better than the organs of the state, which are often hindered by bureaucracy, careerism and political correctness (again). In the interest of success the main communication themes (messages) supporting the European authorities' intended response to the Balkan terrorist threat must be worked out. The most suitable communication channels and key communicators must also be identified well in advance. A further aspect of the strategic communication category is the psychological preparation of the citizens to the possibility (or likelihood) of a terrorist attack.

The driving force behind the successful resolution of every asymmetric conflict is the flow of accurate, timely, and actionable intelligence. Although it may be a repulsive idea to keep fellow citizens under surveillance based on their religious convictions, it is essential to recruit informant networks in the Muslims communities, which can serve as timely warning systems. Intelligence officers, fluent in the Balkan languages, able to move in Balkan society without arousing suspicion, and familiar with Salafist doctrines are also needed. Since it takes at least a year of very intensive study to acquire fluency in a Slavic language, there is no time to lose – preparations must start now. Intelligence coverage of the Muslim communities of the Balkans and thorough knowledge of the potential opponent's language and ideology offer the Hungarian national security services the opportunity to meet the intelligence organizations of other nations as equals: when it comes to information exchange and joint operations, they will be able to make a positive contribution.

In sum, the threat from the Balkans is real, and affects Hungary, as well as the rest of Europe. There is no reason to be afraid of it – or rather, fear must be suppressed: fear means that the terrorist (without executing a single operation) is one step closer to his goal, the breaking of society's will. There is good reason to pay close attention to the threat, and make full use of the months (or perhaps 1-2 years) to prepare, before the attention of terrorists is turned to Hungary.

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