

**BIN LADEN AND THE BALKANS:  
THE POLITICS OF ANTI-TERRORISM**

9 November 2001



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## **BIN LADEN AND THE BALKANS: THE POLITICS OF ANTI-TERRORISM**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The global focus on Islamist extremist-inspired terrorism resulting from the 11 September atrocities has raised the question of the potential for such terrorist activity in, or emanating from, the Balkans.

Given the presence of ex-mujahidin in Bosnia, the tens of thousands of former military and paramilitary fighters in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia who are Muslims by tradition, if not for the most part by observance, and the large deployments of U.S. and other troops in the region, some (though by no means all) senior Western sources describe the potential terrorist threat as significant. In this context, international officials and organisations in parts of the region, as well as certain governments, have taken extra security precautions, and clamped down on individuals and groups suspected of possible links to terrorist networks.

Although heightened security precautions are obviously appropriate at this time, it is important that the issue of Islamist extremism in the Balkans, and the risk of terrorism associated with it, not be painted as a larger problem than it is. While Osama bin Laden himself may have visited Albania several years ago, and individuals with links to his organisation have passed through the Balkans, it appears that only Bosnia has significant numbers of potential Islamist extremists. Elsewhere the potential for Islamist-inspired violence seems slight, and to hinge on the weakness of institutions rather than ideological sympathies with the enemies of the West.

From this perspective, and in the absence of further evidence demanding a more robust response, the best way to prevent deadly violence in or emanating from the Balkans may simply be continued engagement by the international community across the spectrum of peace keeping and peace building tasks.

There is no doubt that, in the Balkans as elsewhere, the new and overwhelming Western foreign policy priority has triggered some energetic attempts to borrow or co-opt the anti-terrorist agenda. Many politicians and propagandists in Serbia, Bosnia and Macedonia have been given the opportunity to puff fresh air into stereotypes of fanatical bearded mujahidin, myths of Muslim 'backwardness', and theories about the 'civilisational' abyss separating Islam from the West that served sinister purposes in the 1990s.

In this context, it is important that the international community should not be distracted by the wave of anti-Muslim opinion and propaganda that has washed through Serbia, Macedonia, and the Serb-controlled parts of Bosnia. In these countries, and also in Albania, Western capitals must reward governments' overall democratic performance, not the volume of their denunciations of terrorism.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

1. Closely monitor in Bosnia and Kosovo the activities of Islamist organisations which may have links to terrorist networks and which, if they entrench themselves, could present a permanent potential security threat.
2. Follow through on Washington's warning to ethnic Albanian leaders in Pristina on 15 October 2001 that 'any provocative acts by armed Albanian groups would be seen as support for terrorism'.
3. Examine carefully the allegations emanating from Serbia and Macedonia about continuing Albanian links to bin Laden, but in the absence of credible supporting evidence be prepared to publicly discount them.
4. Do not be distracted by, or accept, the wave of anti-Muslim opinion and propaganda that has washed through Serbia, Macedonia, and the Serb-controlled parts of Bosnia.
5. In the absence of specific evidence demanding a more robust response, recognise that the main Balkans dimension of the war on terrorism is the long term work of peace building – institutional reform and development being the best way to close in the spaces where terrorist networks can potentially operate.

**Belgrade/Podgorica/Pristina/Sarajevo/  
Skopje/Tirana/Brussels, 9 November 2001**



## **BIN LADEN AND THE BALKANS: THE POLITICS OF ANTI-TERRORISM**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The global focus on Islamist terrorism that resulted from the 11 September atrocities has raised the question of the potential for terrorist activity in the Balkans. Terrorist cells and networks can operate without a broad base of popular support; and any country or province with a majority Muslim population and a large U.S. military presence is de facto a potential target for al-Qaida. Given the presence of former mujahidin in Bosnia, and the tens of thousands of former military and paramilitary fighters in Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia who are Muslims by tradition if not, for the most part, by observance, some (though by no means all) senior international community sources describe the potential terrorist threat as significant.

Accordingly, international officials and organisations in parts of the region, as well as certain governments, have taken extra security precautions, and clamped down on individuals and groups suspected of possible links to terrorist networks, in ways that have not given a high priority to civil liberties. In Bosnia, SFOR claims that its vigilance has averted specific terrorist actions.

Less noticed, but of real significance to political developments within the region, was the decision by the United States – leader of both the ‘war on terrorism’ and the international community in the Balkans – to send a strong message to ethnic Albanian leaders. Henceforth, the demarche said, ‘any provocative acts by armed Albanian groups would be seen by the U.S. as support for terrorist

forces’.<sup>1</sup> If it is implemented, this fundamental clarification could assist the peace process in Macedonia and normalisation in Kosovo.

At the same time, in the Balkans as elsewhere, the new and overwhelming Western foreign policy priority has triggered some energetic attempts to borrow or co-opt the anti-terrorist agenda. The fact that most leaders in the region genuinely support this agenda does not prevent them from exploiting it, too.

Standing aside from U.S.-led coalitions is not an option for the region’s governments. The Bush Administration’s interest in these countries is perceived as being too contingent, too uncertain, for them to risk affronting the only superpower, and inclusion in the ‘anti-terrorist coalition’ has become the latest yardstick of status as a friend of the Western world. The only leader who has ventured to trample publicly on U.S. sensitivities on this issue has been Yugoslav president Vojislav Kostunica (see below).

Hence, presidents and prime ministers have expressed their support, and media around the region have been saturated with claims and allegations about Osama bin Laden, terrorism, and Islamist extremism. However, declarations by Balkan politicians that they stand foursquare with the Americans against the terrorist threat generally have a subtext of opportunism. The new U.S. priority has provided many politicians and propagandists in Serbia, Bosnia and Macedonia with an opportunity to puff fresh air into stereotypes of fanatical bearded mujahidin, myths

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<sup>1</sup> From statement released on 15 October 2001 by the U.S. mission in Kosovo.

of Muslim 'backwardness', and theories about the 'civilisational' abyss separating Islam from the West that served sinister purposes in the 1990s.

In short, although the world may have changed on 11 September 2001, Balkan politicians and propagandists are still trying to make the new world fit the old. If, suddenly, the only stories the foreign media wish to hear concern threats from former, potential or imaginary Islamist terrorists, the Balkan markets of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia have been quick to oblige – for reasons of their own. These reports are analysed and assessed below.

Ironically, the two groups that most benefited from U.S. and Western European engagement in the region during the 1990s – Bosniaks and ethnic Albanians – have now been portrayed within the region, and even beyond it, as potential supporters of bin Laden and al-Qaida. Poorly researched or sensationally written stories in Western newspapers about terrorist hotbeds in the Balkans probably have no ulterior motive.<sup>2</sup> The same cannot be said when the local media run such stories. There, the intention is to justify a tougher stance towards ethnic Albanians in southern Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia, and to increase international suspicion of – and pressure on – Bosniak and other Muslim leaders.

This wave of anti-Islamist propaganda is diversionary, intended in part to persuade local governments as well as Western policy makers to relax their efforts to address some perhaps more compelling sources of Balkans instability. Those sources include such political considerations as the unresolved nature of Serbian state identity and Montenegrin national identity; Kosovo's need for final status; the contradictions of the Dayton Peace Agreement for Bosnia; and the bitterness felt by ethnic Albanians about their traditional second class status in Macedonia and by ethnic Macedonians about the political settlement brokered at Ohrid on 13 August 2001.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, 'Bosnia Seen as Hospitable Base and Sanctuary for Terrorists', *Los Angeles Times*, 7 October 2001, 'School of Hate in the Balkans: How bin Laden's al-Qaida got a foothold in the Balkans', *Die Zeit*, 31 October 2001, and 'Al Qaeda's Balkan Links', *Wall Street Journal Europe*, 1 November 2001.

There are, moreover, the common factors of inept governance, poor public security, weak rule of law, pervasive economic backwardness, institutional corruption and organised crime. These combine to produce an environment where international terrorist networks can hide personnel and money. From this perspective, the most important Balkans dimension of the war on terrorism is the long-term work of peace-building – institutional reform and development.

This is not to deny that Islamist extremists did play a minor part in the conflict in Bosnia in the first half of the 1990s, or that others similarly inspired may – despite denials – have fought with ethnic Albanian forces in Kosovo and Macedonia more recently.<sup>3</sup> Such extremism, to the extent that it existed, was a consequence rather than a cause of violence in Bosnia, let alone in Kosovo or Macedonia. It continues to enjoy only very marginal support in those places. There is no risk that significant numbers of Muslims in the Balkans might support Islamist extremists; such a development would contradict their religious traditions, their political views, and their life styles, which are emphatically Western.<sup>4</sup>

The great majority of Muslims in the region would agree with Germany's Chancellor Schroeder that the war on terrorism 'is not a clash of civilisations but a war *for* civilisation'. Indeed, surveying the wars of Yugoslav succession since 1991, Serb and Croat nationalists have been notably more effective in using Orthodox and Catholic versions of *Christian* extremism as mobilising agents or proxy-causes of violence against innocent civilian targets.

Nor is it to dismiss the sincerity of the widespread anger in Serbia and Macedonia at the political

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<sup>3</sup> According to a British daily newspaper, Interpol officials have stated that bin Laden 'supplied one of his top military commanders for an elite KLA unit during the Kosovo conflict'. *The Independent*, 21 October 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the activities of some Islamist organisations in Bosnia and Kosovo may present a security threat. Wahhabi practices have little support among the Muslim communities of the Balkans, where they generate more resentment than enthusiasm. However, populations impoverished and traumatised by conflict may be highly vulnerable to penetration by well-resourced radical organisations, some of which are considered to have links to terrorist networks.

successes scored by ethnic Albanians in the region since 1999, and also at the international community's perceived double standards. For, in both Kosovo and Macedonia, political groups associated with acts which almost all ethnic Serbs and Macedonians view as terrorism – and cannot be expected to view as anything else – have close ties to, or are active within, political parties that are accepted by the international community as legitimate actors. This fact creates resentment at perceived double standards. To the extent that the international community is unable to address this resentment, its objectives in the region may become harder to achieve.

## II. ALBANIA

Following the 11 September attacks, Albania went into a form of mourning. Church bells pealed, flags stood at half-mast, and all conferences, concerts and sports matches were cancelled. Politicians from all sides condemned the attacks and expressed full support to the U.S. Parliament passed a resolution condemning 'these barbaric acts against innocent civilians and against the values of freedom and democracy in the world.' The Democratic Party (DP)-led opposition coalition, 'Union for Victory' (UfV), expressed support for the resolution, despite missing the vote because of its current boycott of Parliament.<sup>5</sup>

Albanians were stunned by the scale and audacity of the attacks. They were also visibly shocked by television images of the backwardness of Afghanistan, the misery of its people, and the fanaticism and hatred expressed by Taliban supporters in Pakistan. But they were also – and remain - deeply angered by media allegations, emanating from Albania's Balkan neighbours, which claim that Albania is harbouring Islamist terrorists and allowing its territory to be used for their training camps. This in turn has opened a vicious internal debate centred around which political party may have had the more relaxed policy towards Islamist fundamentalists: the right-wing DP, which governed from 1992 until 1997, or the Socialist-led government which then came to power.

Almost everyone has at least one relative or acquaintance in the U.S., where there are an estimated 400,000 citizens of Albanian origin. Within hours of the attacks, phone lines to the U.S. were jammed with anxious callers. The daily *Shekulli* commented that the Albanian people are very close to Americans, despite the fact that they are predominantly Muslims. Despite intensive efforts at Muslim and Christian indoctrination over the past decade, Albanians in general remain largely secular.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It sees Parliament as an 'illegitimate' institution after the party's defeat in the recent elections: see ICG Balkans Briefing, *Albania's Parliamentary Elections*, 23 August 2001.

<sup>6</sup> The estimated breakdown of religious affiliation is as follows: 65 per cent Muslim, 25 per cent Orthodox, and 10 per cent Catholic.

## A. POLICY RESPONSES

The government's response to 11 September was swift and comprehensive. Prime Minister Ilir Meta announced that Albania 'is ready to put everything at the disposal' of the U.S. and Western nations to assist their fight against international terrorism. Interior Minister Ilir Gjoni ordered a nation-wide operation to check the identification documents of all foreigners, especially those from Arab countries.<sup>7</sup>

The police, the General Prosecution Office, and the intelligence service (SHIK) are working closely with the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to uncover terrorists suspected of involvement in the attacks. Police have also been ordered to check and investigate the identities of all citizens of Arab origin living in the country. Information gathered will be analysed by an expert group. Six leading members of Islamic organisations were expelled during October, and further expulsions are expected. Strict controls are being imposed on prominent Muslim organisations such as the Red Crescent, the Coordination Council of Islamic Associations, the Islamic World Committee and the Koran Foundation. Police have demanded full lists of people leading these associations, their activities, their country of origin and the exact mission of their association.

The Bank of Albania has ordered a check on the country's private banks, such as the Arab-Islamic Bank and the Malaysian Inter-commercial Bank, to uncover any possible terrorist funds. Security at the country's only airport and all border crossings has been stepped up to prevent Islamist extremists from entering the country. The National Security Council held a meeting on 1 October 2001 headed by President Rexhep Meidani, with the participation of most of the cabinet, as well as the Governor of the Bank of Albania. The meeting focused on measures to be taken by the state institutions.

President Meidani said that the armed forces should define a new strategy to prevent terrorist attacks in Albania. Meidani, who was addressing soldiers engaged in an exercise in Koplík, said that

the challenge against terrorism was imminent even in Albania: 'Any country is threatened by this, including Albania. This demands a review of basic principles of defence, listing terrorism as a new type of warfare'.<sup>8</sup>

Most recently, on 15 October, parliament unanimously adopted a nine-point anti-terrorism Plan of Action to coordinate a 'united anti-terrorist front' including political, military and economic elements.

## B. ISLAMIC INVOLVEMENT IN POST-COMMUNIST ALBANIA

Following the collapse of the staunchly atheist one-party state in 1991, delegations came to Albania from around the Muslim world. With Islamic aid, work began on restoring damaged and neglected mosques, and classes were set up inside the mosques to teach children to read basic Arabic script. In the chaotic and crime-ridden conditions of this immediate transition period, Muslim leaders argued that the state should consider introducing Islamic laws if it could not restore order. By the winter of 1992, international aid was flowing into the country. Alongside the many Christian charities, the Islamic Relief Agency (IRA) played an important role in the distribution of medical and relief supplies. A spokesman for the IRA said that he found Albania's Muslims ignorant of their faith, aware that they were Muslims but not knowing what this actually meant. The country's Muslims, he said, were like a dry sponge, ready to soak up anything given to them.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike the other religious groups that sent assistance, the Islamic representatives were intent on fostering an economic, as well as a spiritual and cultural base in the country. In October 1992, representatives from the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) visited Tirana. The IDB delegation offered to invest in all sectors of the economy, promote exports and grant much needed credit. This was what the new DP government wanted to hear. After the failure of American and European capital investment in Albania, the alternative-

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<sup>7</sup> There are a number of Egyptians living in Albania, together with a smaller number of people from the Middle East.

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<sup>8</sup> *Albania Daily News*, 2 October 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Miranda Vickers and James Pettifer, *Albania - From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*, C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., second edition, 1999, p. 104.



identifying slogan 'Towards Europe or Islam' began to appear in media discussions.

However, even though many Albanians believed the West had turned its back, they were alarmed by the government's decision in 1992 to become a full member of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). The decision had been made hurriedly and without consulting parliament. Albanians worried that it would align Albania closer to the Islamic world. A sharp debate followed, with the Socialist Party voicing the general unease at what was widely interpreted as a backward step. However, the decision to join the OIC was mainly in response to the West's failure to invest, to provide jobs, and to convince the government that, if the conflict then raging in Bosnia spread to Kosovo, it could expect protection.

### **C. BIN LADEN IN ALBANIA?**

According to a number of unsubstantiated reports, bin Laden is said to have visited Albania in 1994 as a wealthy Saudi Arabian businessman, offering support to charities rebuilding mosques and schools as a cover to infiltrate his operatives. The London Independent has quoted Interpol allegations that bin Laden 'was known' to have visited Albania.<sup>10</sup>

The spotlight fell on possible bin Laden activities in Albania with the arrest in 1998 of a French passport holder, Claude Kader, believed to be of Middle Eastern origin. He confessed to membership in a bin Laden group and told investigators he had been sent to give weapons to the guerrillas of the Kosovo Liberation Army, then beginning their war against the Serbs. Kader said the KLA had turned him down and that he had returned to Albania with his weapons. A few weeks later, after a row in his flat in Tirana, he shot his Albanian interpreter and was tried for murder. He told prosecutors that four other bin Laden operatives remained at large.<sup>11</sup>

Police suspect that bin Laden, working with organised crime networks, may have taken advantage of the theft of 100,000 Albanian

passports during the chaos that swept the country in 1997. In the early post-Communist period of close ties with Islamic nations, a prominent Islamic intellectual, Bashkim Gazidede, was appointed by the DP government to head the intelligence service. This raised concern that suspected terrorists may have acquired citizenship at the time. Gazidede fled Albania after the 1997 uprising and is currently thought to reside in Libya.<sup>12</sup>

Several high-ranking Americans cancelled visits to Albania in summer 1999, believing there was a risk from terrorist groups linked to bin Laden.<sup>13</sup> A number of Islamist terrorists were arrested and deported in 1998-99 for plotting to attack the U.S. embassy in Tirana. Since then U.S. intelligence has been given a free hand to obtain the detention and expulsion of foreigners suspected of planning to use Albania as a springboard for terrorism in Western Europe.

After the events of 11 September 2001, political factions and the media under their influence quickly made capital out of the situation. Bitter polemics erupted between the Socialists and the Democrats, each side accusing the other of laxity towards terrorism, allowing individuals such as bin Laden to operate in the country. This has been termed by one newspaper 'a crazy competition' to try and prove when Osama bin Laden was in Albania – whether under the Democratic Party-led government (1992-1997) or the Socialist-led administration which came to power in 1997.<sup>14</sup> Another daily joined in the criticism: 'The government is busy trying to present Democrat leader Sali Berisha as a friend of Islamic terrorists, while the opposition Union for Victory has been touring Europe to denounce the 'terrorism' of its own state against the opposition.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Colin Brown, 'Bin Laden linked to Albanian drug gangs', *The Independent*, 21 October 2001.

<sup>11</sup> *The Scotsman*, 21 September 2001.

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<sup>12</sup> Institute for War and Peace Reporting, *Balkan Crisis Reports*, 26 September 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Secretary of State Madeleine Albright decided not to stop in Albania in June 1999 following her visit to Macedonia due to security concerns. Defence Secretary William Cohen cancelled a trip to Tirana the following month due to an alleged threat related to Islamic militants affiliated to Osama bin Laden. Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke cancelled his visit to Tirana planned for August 1999; and President Clinton avoided the country in his subsequent visit to the region.

<sup>14</sup> *Korrieri*, 25 September 2001.

<sup>15</sup> *Shekulli*, 26 September 2001.

This was a reference to the right-wing daily *Tema*, which had claimed that the Socialist-led government was using ‘terror’ tactics against the opposition. *Tema* accused the government of hypocrisy by professing ‘pro-U.S. national unity’, while simultaneously attacking the opposition:

Since the day of the tragedy, Premier Ilir Meta has made two provocative gestures: first, by threatening to bring former President Sali Berisha to court by force to satisfy the whims of a declared killer and secondly, by ordering the closure of the first television station in the country not under his control [the pro-opposition Shijak TV], as is the case with newspapers and the other TV stations. He probably thinks that by supporting the U.S. in its anti-terrorism fight, we have to endure even his state terrorism against the opposition and free press in Albania.<sup>16</sup>

The Socialist Party’s allegations enraged the opposition. The former deputy chairman of the intelligence service, Bujar Rama, responded that there were no terrorist bases in Albania when the Democratic Party was in power but with the breakdown of state control in 1997, organised crime and links with foreign criminal groups have flourished.

Rama flatly rejected the allegations that bin Laden was received in Albania in 1994 ‘as a businessman ... by the former chief of SHIK, Bashkim Gazidede. In no way could such a wealthy person have visited Albania without the relevant official protocol: such a person could never have come without having provided his identity and, moreover, Gazidede was not permitted to receive such people’.<sup>17</sup>

Foreign Minister, Arta Dade, claims that some people with terrorist links were living in Albania prior to her Socialist Party’s return to power in 1997. However, she says that the Albanian government – in cooperation with the intelligence services of the U.S., Italy and other European countries – expelled them. She insists that Albania is now ‘a safe place with full security’.<sup>18</sup>

The daily *Gazeta Shqiptare* noted that the geographical, political, social and economic aspects of such a ‘monstrous attack’ as the U.S. had suffered could divert attention from small countries like Albania, leaving them ‘outside the priorities of the international community’.<sup>19</sup> The paper argued that the only way to avoid abandonment was for Albanians themselves to set aside their political animosities and present the world with a picture of internal stability in the hope of accelerating accession to the European Union:

In these times, we Albanians must demonstrate that we are capable of building a really democratic environment, far from primitivism and excessive conflicts combined with a more rational foreign policy. This might encourage an accelerated pace in Albania’s integration process and help consolidate Albania’s role in resolving the main concerns the civilised world presently is going through.<sup>20</sup>

This commentary is perhaps the most interesting to date, because it looks beyond the immediate anger at regional efforts to discredit Albania and points out that internal disputes are also damaging the country’s image.

#### **D. SKOPJE STIRS THE POT**

After he visited Tirana on 19 September 2001, Macedonian Defence Minister Vlado Buckovski was said by his hosts to have claimed that ‘There are camps in Tropoja and Kukes for training terrorists who have terrorised Macedonia.’ This was rejected by Defence Minister Pandeli Majko and Interior Minister Ilir Gjoni as ‘baseless and untrue’.<sup>21</sup> Tirana insists it has done its utmost both to apprehend suspected Islamist extremists and to curtail the activities of ethnic Albanian fighters from Kosovo and Macedonia who try to use Albania as a base.

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<sup>19</sup> *Gazeta Shqiptare*, 24 September 2001.

<sup>20</sup> *Gazeta Shqiptare*, 24 September 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Interviewed by ICG in Skopje on 19 October, Minister Buckovski denied having made any such claim. Rather, he said, he had merely inquired about certain rumours in circulation. If so, the ensuing scandal testifies to Tirana’s extreme sensitivity on this issue.

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<sup>16</sup> *Tema*, 18 September 2001.

<sup>17</sup> *Albania Daily News*, 26 September 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Institute for War and Peace Reporting, *Balkan Crisis Reports*, 23 September 2001.

Tirana's police chief, Bilbil Mema, told a press conference: 'There is no Islamic threat in Albania. This country is no longer a refuge for Islamic terrorists.' Gjoni echoed Mema by emphatically denying the Macedonian accusations: 'I want to assure all Albanian citizens that we have no information on any terrorist organisation in Albania'.<sup>22</sup> His statement was corroborated by U.S. Ambassador Joseph Lemprecht, who commended the Meta administration for its collaboration with anti-terrorist efforts. The ambassador also said Washington had neither identified nor located any terrorist cells in Albania.<sup>23</sup>

Defence Minister Pandeli Majko stated that 'Albania and its armed forces are ready to accept any investigation into the so-called training camps for terrorists.' He noted that NATO troops are stationed in Albania, and the OSCE mission is 'free to move around'.<sup>24</sup> The Chief of the General Staff of the Albanian Armed Forces, Pellumb Qazimi, said that Buckovski's statement was intended to shift attention away from the source of the crisis, in Macedonia. 'These statements are untrue, baseless,' said Qazimi, adding that 'there has been a NATO team monitoring the border since the beginning of the crisis in Macedonia'.<sup>25</sup>

Deputy Foreign Minister Pellumb Xhufi expressed irritation at 'statements by neighbouring politicians and media which linked Albania to bin Laden's terrorist cells', simply on the ground that it is a predominantly Muslim country. 'There is always a tendency to classify Albanians as the troublemakers of the region', he said.

Official Tirana was particularly incensed by a *Washington Times* article on 18 September 2001, which appeared after several reports of links between Albania and bin Laden in the Serbian and Macedonian press. It alleged that Albania might well have served as the springboard for the Washington and New York attacks.<sup>26</sup> The *London Times* has alerted readers to the dangers of travel to

Albania, citing a Foreign Office list naming the country as a possible base for Islamic terrorists.<sup>27</sup>

Macedonian media allegations that Albania harbours and trains ethnic Albanian 'terrorists' from the National Liberation Army (KLA) in Macedonia and nurtures their links with Islamist structures, in particular Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaida, drew particularly heavy criticism. A commentary in the daily *Koha Jone* noted that once again Albania's neighbours were demonstrating hostility: 'Immediately our neighbours hurried to imply terrorist links with those Albanian factors [KLA] that cause trouble for them'.<sup>28</sup> The daily *Shekulli* also lashed out at Albania's Balkan neighbours for attempting to reinforce the 'dangerous Islamic image of Albania'.<sup>29</sup>

## E. CONCLUSION

The response in Albania to the events of 11 September and their aftermath has been fourfold. First, there is keen sympathy for the victims. Secondly, there has been a profusion of official statements asserting that Albania is a terrorist-free zone and detailing immediate measures to ensure that Islamist terrorists cannot operate from Albanian soil. Thirdly, there is widespread anger and indignation towards Balkan neighbours for their accusations that Albania offers a sanctuary for terrorists. Fourthly, elements on both the right and left have attempted to wring political advantage from the horrors.

Albanians are as a rule pro-American. In general, they look down on their Balkan neighbours (the same neighbours who look down on them). Like most Serbs, Croats and Macedonians, as well as many Bosniaks, they regard Islam and the East as backward. Unlike their neighbours, however, they instinctively distrust the big Western European powers that divided Albanians among several states at the beginning of the last century. The U.S., on the other hand, is Western and democratic without being responsible for historic injustices to Albania; it is the home of the largest Albanian

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<sup>22</sup> *Albania Daily News*, 21 September 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Institute for War and Peace Reporting, *Balkan Crisis Reports*, 26 September 2001.

<sup>24</sup> *Albania Daily News*, 1 October 2001.

<sup>25</sup> *Albania Daily News*, 3 October 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Institute for War and Peace Reporting, *Balkan Crisis Reports*, 26 September 2001.

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<sup>27</sup> *The Times*, 9 October 2001. The warning is no longer carried on the official Foreign Office website.

<sup>28</sup> *Koha Jone*, 25 September 2001.

<sup>29</sup> *Shekulli*, 26 September 2001.

Diaspora, and it is the world's most powerful country.

Serbian and Macedonian media allegations that Tirana is secretly supporting terrorists operating out of Albania appear to have been promoted by those countries' intelligence services.<sup>30</sup> These and other such reports remain unsubstantiated. Hence the authorities' growing concern that they appear to be accepted at face value in the West, where influential media echo the allegations that Albania poses an Islamic threat to Europe.<sup>31</sup>

This in turn has led to Tirana's perhaps overzealous effort to eradicate all fundamentalist Islamic influences from the country. The international community should examine the allegations emanating from Serbia and Macedonia about continuing Albanian links to bin Laden, and if no evidence comes to light be prepared to publicly discount them. Otherwise, pro-reform parties in Tirana may lose ground to hard-line opposition parties. If this happens, the present government's efforts to avoid entanglement in Macedonia and Kosovo would be jeopardised.

Until 1999 – the end of the Kosovo war and restoration of law and order in most of the country – such allegations had some foundation. During the lawless and anarchic period of the mid-1990s, it was easy for anyone to operate illicitly and undetected in Albania. However, Albania's citizenship laws were tightened after the 1998 bombing of two U.S. embassies in Africa, and thorough checks were made on applicants, in collaboration with international agencies. Nevertheless, some Islamist terrorists may have received citizenship during the mid 1990s.

While weapons and other forms of logistical support have been smuggled from Albania to ethnic Albanian guerrillas in southern Serbia and

western Macedonia, the present government has – unlike its predecessor – tried to secure the country's borders and to halt arms smuggling and other illegal activity. That this effort has not met with more success is due above all to the lack of funds to train and equip an effective border police.

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<sup>30</sup> The same reports omit to mention that Greece has had no success in destroying its domestic terrorist organisations, 17 November and MAVI, even though the former ranks as one of Europe's most successful such groups. The omission, in Albanian eyes, is easily explained: the groups in question are neither Muslim nor Albanian.

<sup>31</sup> Examples include 'School of Hate in the Balkans: How bin Laden's al-Qaida got a foothold in the Balkans', *Die Zeit*, 31 October 2001, and 'Al Qaeda's Balkan Links', *Wall Street Journal Europe*, 1 November 2001.

### III. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

In post-Dayton Bosnia, a state of two 'entities' (the Federation and the Republika Srpska) and three 'constituent peoples' (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats), unified responses to significant domestic or foreign events are almost unheard of. Inevitably, the 'war on terrorism' has drawn very different reactions among Bosnia's different political elites, ranging from panic to smug satisfaction. The response of the international community has been equally mixed, as damage limitation and force protection have yielded to expressions of confidence in the Bosnian authorities' sincere willingness – if not full capacity – to cope.

What all the local and international reactions have had in common, however, is an acceptance of the fact that the agenda has changed. Events in the outside world have intruded into what had become an increasingly self-reflective and arcane set of political issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The past has come back to haunt Bosnians; but the new post-11 September priorities also offer some opportunities to overcome longstanding deadlocks in the peace-implementation process.

#### A. THE VIEW FROM THE FEDERATION

The Alliance for Democratic Change, which both comprises the state-level Council of Ministers as one set of cross-entity coalition partners and governs Bosnia's more populous entity (the Federation) in another grouping of parties, has been embarrassed and energised in equal measure since 11 September. It has been embarrassed because there are wartime and early post-war skeletons in the closets of some of its member parties about which most Bosniak politicians doubtless know a good deal, but for which the current leadership needs to deny responsibility.<sup>32</sup> It has been energised by the necessity and opportunity to put its own house in order.

Bosniak leaders want to be included among terrorism's enemies. Yet thanks to the legacy of the 1992-95 war; to fragile and dysfunctional

government structures; to a geographical position that makes Bosnia a bridge between East and West; and to a national make-up that distinguishes Bosnia from its neighbours (44 per cent of Bosnia's 3.7 million citizens are Muslims, and they now constitute at least two-thirds of the population of the Federation), Bosnia is the Balkan country first on the international community's list of suspects as a possible facilitator, witting or not, for terrorism.

The commander of NATO-led peace keeping forces in Bosnia, Lt. Gen. John Sylvester, has stated there is no threat to the country from Muslim radicals.<sup>33</sup> However, since neither local nor international officials can prove that there are no real or potential terrorists operating, plotting or sheltering within its borders, politically driven allegations to the contrary have been rife. Hence, the 'war on terrorism' has made Sarajevo jumpy for much the same reasons that affect Tirana. When the international community is directly involved – as it is in Bosnia - disquiet becomes acute anxiety.

On 17 October 2001, the U.S. and UK closed their Sarajevo embassies for three days in response to a 'credible threat' of imminent terrorist attack. The following week, NATO officials claimed to have prevented an attack on U.S. SFOR bases in northeastern Bosnia. However, they denied finding any evidence of terrorist training camps in the country. Then, on 25 October, SFOR claimed to have 'disrupted' the putative Bosnian links of the al-Qaida network. The following day, NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson stated that 'at least one' of the dozen or so suspects detained by local police or SFOR since 1 October had 'direct links to al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden'. 'The threat', Robertson added, as if in direct reproof to Gen. Sylvester, 'has not gone'.<sup>34</sup> On 5 November, *Time Magazine* reported that SFOR and local police were scouring the mountains of central Bosnia in search of five suspected terrorists.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Senad Avdic, 'Ukoliko Bin Laden ne posjeduje pasos BiH, sam je kriv: Trebao ga je traziti na vrijeme i dobio bi gal', *Slobodna Bosna*, 20 September 2001, pp 5-6.

<sup>33</sup> BBC News, 'Analysis: Bosnian stability at stake', 15 October 2001, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news>.

<sup>34</sup> *Wall Street Journal Europe*, 24 October 2001.

<sup>35</sup> 'Petorica terorists kriju se u brdima centralne Bosne', *Dnevni avaz*, 6 November 2001. The *Time* article also made it plain that the putative terrorist to whom Robertson referred was Bensajeh Belkacem, an Algerian arrested in Zenica on 8 October 2001.

The world in general and the U.S. in particular are nowadays disinclined to recall the circumstances that made the internationally recognised Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina dependent on Arab largesse and Iranian arms during the war, let alone caused it to welcome some 3,000 Islamic volunteers into its armed forces.<sup>36</sup> There is thus little public awareness abroad of how and why Bosnia finds itself with a mujahidin legacy today.

The Federation and state governments have denied categorically that Osama bin Laden was ever in Bosnia or received one of its passports. They have also talked up their recent record of extraditing suspected terrorists to those countries in which they have been charged, their determination to complete a stringent review of all wartime and post-war naturalisation decisions, and promised 'hell' to any of the 70 would-be terrorists from Afghanistan whom unspecified intelligence sources alleged in late September were en route to Bosnia in expectation of a quiet life of rest and recreation.<sup>37</sup>

But Bosnian leaders have been at pains, too, to play down the number of post-1992 naturalisation decisions relating to persons of North African and Middle Eastern origin (some 420), to point out that all but 70 were settled, pre-war residents of the republic, to emphasise that they have been far from alone in receiving American requests for information about individuals with terrorist

connections, and to note that Bosnia shares very distinguished company on the lists of countries which may provide unintended hospitality to active or sleeping terrorists.

On the other hand, energetic declarations by Bosnian politicians that they stand foursquare with the Americans against the terrorist threat have often had a subtext. Bosniaks, in particular, point to the weak state structures bequeathed by Dayton to excuse their inability to confirm that there are no terrorists in the country and to plead their case for a more integrated and competent Bosnian state that can control its own borders, air space, armies, intelligence agencies, police, customs services, and airwaves. Latterly, they have been moved – either by the new circumstances or by international pressure – to begin to remedy some of their own structural deficiencies.

Bosniaks have also found it appropriate, however, to note that the death toll following the fall of Srebrenica in 1995 was higher than that at the World Trade Center, and to ask when Bosnia's NATO-led guardians will get around to capturing the two arch-war crimes suspects who plotted that and other atrocities, Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic.<sup>38</sup> This feeling on the part of Bosniaks that a double standard is being applied has recently led the High Representative to declare that 'the struggle against terrorism also means the arrest of Karadzic'.<sup>39</sup> SFOR, too, has sought of late to apply balm to Bosniak wounds: emphasising its cooperation with the Federation authorities and seeking to appear less high-handed in its hunt for terrorists.

Meanwhile, those sections of the Sarajevo press that always disliked the pro-Islamic tendency in Bosniak politics have joined the international hunt to unmask potential terrorists and their connections with the previous government, while other media outlets have sought to play down the warmed-over allegations of terrorist links and bases. The former have condemned the old regime of the Party for Democratic Action (SDA) under Alija Izetbegovic

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<sup>36</sup> The Clinton Administration and other Western states turned a blind eye to the shipment of Iranian arms to Croatia and Bosnia in defiance of a UN embargo. For an account of Bosnia's retired mujahidin, see Sead Numanovic, 'Bosnia: Mujahidin Revival Fears', *IWPR Balkan Crisis Report*, No 286, 5 October 2001.

<sup>37</sup> 'BiH ocekuje ubacivanje 70 Osaminih fanatika', *Jutarnji List*, 29 September 2001. The Federation interior minister who threatened to make Bosnia hell for anyone arriving from Afghanistan, Muhamed Besic, however, resigned when the party that had nominated him (the Bosniak Party for BiH) denounced his alarmist statement and withdrew its support of him. 'Kamenica umjesto Besica?', *Nezavisne novine*, 13-14 October 2001. The exact causes of Besic's resignation (or removal) remain mysterious. The Americans were reportedly extremely annoyed at the departure of a man whom they trusted. Yet both local journalistic and SFOR sources have told ICG that he was not up to the job: by virtue of his age, health and personal circumstances. It has also been suggested, however, that his moves to crack down on corruption cost him his job. See Vildana Selimbegovic, 'Zasto sam smijenjen', *BH Dani*, 2 November 2001, pp 8-11.

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Zija Dizdarevic, 'Teror i prividi', *Oslobodjenje*, 27 September 2001, and Haris Silajdzic and David L Phillips, 'Bosnians Know What's to Be Done', *International Herald Tribune*, 2 October 2001.

<sup>39</sup> This was *Oslobodjenje's* front page headline on 6 November 2001, paraphrasing what Wolfgang Petritsch had said in Banja Luka the previous day.

for casually dispensing some 12,000 Bosnian passports and cultivating Islamic favour - and fervour - during and after the war, while the latter have deprecated the impact of such reporting on Bosnia's reputation and prospects for securing foreign investment.<sup>40</sup>

## B. IZETBEGOVIC, THE WAR AND ISLAM

The Bosnian Muslims' century-long journey towards identifying themselves as a nation in their own right – rather than as a religious community which might be Croat or Serb or Yugoslav by nationality – ended in secular and socialist nationhood in the late 1960s. There were, however, always some Muslims after the Second World War who aimed to integrate Islam and nation rather than socialism and nation. Izetbegovic was one of these.<sup>41</sup>

Although the government he led during the 1992-1995 war proclaimed its devotion to a multinational, multiconfessional and integral Bosnian state, he and other prominent members of the SDA were also keen to propagate an Islamic reawakening and a specifically Islamic version of

*bosanstvo* (Bosnianism). The nature of the war launched by Serb forces fuelled these aims by highlighting their apparent necessity for a people who were, from the outset, the conflict's principal victims.

Inevitably, links with Islamic countries were strengthened during the war. Saudi Arabia, Iran and Libya were among those that responded to Izetbegovic's appeals for financial assistance and helped subvert the UN embargo that prevented Bosnia from arming itself legally. The funnelling of funds and the doing of deals to purchase arms were centred in Bosnia's embassy in Vienna. Connections, obligations and personal fortunes were forged in the process. These remain important as ties that bind former and current SDA leaders together, and which inhibit any thoroughgoing examination of the penumbra of shady dealings that were required to defend Bosnia.

Some 3,000 Islamic fighters came to Bosnia.<sup>42</sup> Many of them formed a unit, called El Mudzahid, that was formally part of the Seventh Muslim Brigade within the Third Corps of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ABiH). Izetbegovic was the brigade's honorary commander. His view of these fighters remains simple, perhaps implausibly so: nobody invited them to Bosnia, but they could not be asked to leave, 'for most of them had noble intentions: to help people who were endangered and attacked'.<sup>43</sup>

Speculation that tolerance of their presence was tied to Arab states' financial handouts has not been confirmed. The presidency ordered in 1993 that all volunteers in the Bosnian army should have the right to citizenship. According to official figures, of the approximately 12,000 Bosnian passports distributed to foreigners during and immediately after the war, only 70 went to the self-styled mujahidin.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Among the weeklies, *Hrvatska rijec* has occupied the sensationalist bottom end of the terrorist-hunting market, while *Slobodna Bosna* has claimed the middle ground and *BH Dani* the lofty heights, focusing more on the damage done to civil society by the SDA's use of the war to radicalise Muslims than on the supposed risk from mujahidin. (See, especially, the powerful article by Vildana Selimbegovic, 'Putovnica za gori zivot', *BH Dani*, 21 September 2001, pp 29-31.) The principal dailies have also been stratified. *Oslobodjenje* has sought consistently to downplay or deny Bosnia's connections with terrorism, while *Dnevni avaz* has both run with the hares and hunted with the hounds. On 7 October, it devoted nearly a page to a *Los Angeles Times* story (see also fn. 2 above) about a secret State Department report alleging that Bosnia remains a base for terrorism ('hard-core terrorists, some with ties to Osama bin Laden, protected by militant elements of the former Sarajevo government'), but the next day gave equal space and prominence to officials' denials and deprecations of the story. Banja Luka's *Nezavisne novine* – the most respectable newspaper in the RS – has not printed the wilder allegations about mujahidin, but has otherwise enjoyed the terrorist hunt.

<sup>41</sup> For a convenient summary of Bosnian Muslims' national development, see Ivo Banac, 'Bosnian Muslims: From Religious Community to Socialist Nationhood and Post-Communist Statehood, 1918-1992', in Mark Pinson (ed), *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp 129-53.

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<sup>42</sup> Janez Kovac, 'Sarajevo hit by bin Laden panic', *IWPR Balkan Crisis Report*, No 289, 19 October 2001.

<sup>43</sup> Izetbegovic interview in *Panorama* (Bijeljina), 20 October 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Emir Habul, 'Bauk terorizma ujedinjuje politicare', *AIM Sarajevo*, 28 September 2001. Most of the 'foreigners' who received Bosnian citizenship were bearers of Yugoslav passports resident abroad or natives of other ex-Yugoslav republics who lived or came to live in Bosnia.

The El Mudzahid battalion was disbanded in 1996, under U.S. pressure, and the Seventh Muslim Brigade was disbanded soon afterwards. Some former mujahidin settled in a central Bosnian village, where they sometimes threatened SFOR security and may have been responsible for crimes against Croat returnees and police. They dispersed in 2001 when the new authorities evicted them from properties belonging to returning Serbs. Rumours now circulate that numbers of these (former?) mujahidin have concentrated in 'strategic' areas of the Federation, for example near the Sarajevo - Mostar railway.<sup>45</sup>

Bosnia now has many more religiously observant Muslims than it did in 1992. Historic mosques are again places of worship rather than museums for tourists. Gleaming new mosques – often built in a Gulf-kitsch style far removed from local traditions – and Islamic educational centres, often funded by Saudi princes, have sprouted in Sarajevo and other cities whose populations are far less mixed than before the war, whose young women are as likely to be seen in Islamic dress as in shorts,<sup>46</sup> and whose restaurants no longer serve pork.

In part, this is a natural result of a war in which the contending forces tended to embrace at least some aspects of their enemies' caricatures of themselves: Muslims as fundamentalists, Serbs as Chetniks and Croats as Ustashe. Propagation of Islamic values and practices was much assisted, however, by the SDA regime, which turned over to Islamic charities such as the Saudi High Commission for Relief the task of assisting war widows, orphans and other victims of the war. Female beneficiaries were required to cover their heads and their children to attend classes in their faith.

Although only a small minority of Bosniaks has become devout, far more have discovered their Islamic heritage. They have not ceased to be secular Europeans, but a new or rediscovered layer of identity has been superimposed. Bosniaks may like Arabs or Albanians no more than do other South Slavs. They may have cringed at the necessity of welcoming mujahidin during the war and of tolerating their zealotry thereafter. And

they may now resent the embarrassment that these wartime volunteers continue to cause Bosnia. But they cannot disown that part of themselves which shares something with these people.

The SDA, meanwhile, has become a party of patronage, power and money. It is no longer a vehicle for Islamic awakening and cultivation of ties with the Middle East, even if secondary figures such as Hasan Cengic continue to push such policies.<sup>47</sup> But as a party of money and patronage it must also defend those of its stalwarts who made their fortunes and established their power during the war, when an Islamic orientation was both useful and understandable.

In announcing his resignation as party president and ostensible withdrawal from politics on 12 October 2001, Izetbegovic advised his party to occupy the centre ground, to build confidence among Bosnia's three constituent nations, and to promote a common Bosnian nationhood.<sup>48</sup>

As if to substantiate this move to the centre, a public quarrel promptly broke out between the SDA and the Islamic Community.<sup>49</sup> In reverting to what the SDA claimed were its aims before the war, Izetbegovic may have been giving notice that his own long flirtation with the wider Islamic world has not survived the destruction of the World Trade Centre. On the other hand, he may have been making his bid to bring Haris Silajdzic's Party for BiH back into the Bosniak fold and to

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<sup>47</sup> Hasan Cengic, who organised arms procurement for the ABiH during the war, has long been regarded as a leading hard-liner in the SDA.

<sup>48</sup> 'Zasto odlazi Izetbegovic?', *Nezavisne novine*, 13-14 October 2001. Izetbegovic himself had probably never consciously left the centre ground. His perspective has reflected his Bosnian self-awareness as a Muslim between East and West. Addressing the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in 1997, he said: 'The West is neither corrupted nor degenerate. ... It is strong, well educated, and organised. Their schools are better than ours. Their cities are cleaner than ours. ... The level of respect for human rights in the West is higher, and the care for the poor and less capable is better organised. ... Instead of hating the West, let us ... proclaim cooperation instead of confrontation'. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 12 December 1997.

<sup>49</sup> 'Politicka, a ne vjerska stranka!', *Oslobodjenje*, 20 October 2001. The Islamic Community's main complaint against the SDA is that it failed while in power to redeem promises to return the Community's pre-Second World War properties.

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<sup>45</sup> Zeljko Rogosic, 'Al Qaeda prijeli terorom na pruzi Mostar—Ploce', *Nacional*, 23 October 2001.

<sup>46</sup> Style-conscious and well brought up city girls in the former Yugoslavia do not wear shorts in public.



scupper the Alliance for Change in the run up to the 2002 elections.<sup>50</sup> The latter is more likely.

### C. THE VIEW FROM THE REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

The view from Bosnia's other entity, the Serb-controlled Republika Srpska (RS), is far simpler. Its leaders have insisted that the RS is a terrorist-free zone; while its media have gleefully revived old allegations that Osama bin Laden used to sip coffee in Sarajevo with his newly minted Bosnian passport to hand and seized upon new allegations that photographic evidence exists showing Izetbegovic in his company. RS Premier Mladen Ivanic has 'emphasised that the Federation must accept that the problem of terrorism was based solely in that entity,...and that the [RS] was not linked to terrorism in any way.'<sup>51</sup>

There has also been a revival of yellow-journalism stories testifying to the butchery of Serb prisoners of war by knife-wielding mujahidin.<sup>52</sup> The UN spokesman in Bosnia has been quoted that certain RS media have run a disinformation campaign: 'Some media in RS are publishing more and more reports on the existence of terrorist networks in BH without presenting any sort of evidence.' He singled out *Glas Srpski* for special criticism. The RS news agency, SRNA, had to apologise to the Turkish ambassador in Sarajevo after alleging that Turkish nationals had been mujahidin.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Hamza Baksic, 'SDA: Ako ih ne mozes pobijeti, pridruzi im se', *Oslobodjenje*, 24 October 2001.

<sup>51</sup> SRNA news agency, 16 October 2001.

<sup>52</sup> See 'Glavosjece sa Ozrena', *Glas Srpski*, 26 September 2001, and 'Sjeca glava na Crnom vrhu', *Glas Srpski*, 2 October 2001.

<sup>53</sup> *Nezavisne novine*, 12 October 2001. The publication of a recent ICG report on Republika Srpska provoked a minor example of how Bosnian Serb leaders have seized upon the 'war on terrorism' for diversionary purposes. The deputy president of the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), Dragan Cavic, told local media that 'By publishing this report, the ICG wanted to completely minimise the current struggle against terrorism in Bosnia .... We are witnesses to how more details are revealed every day in the neighbouring entity [the Federation] about people who have stayed in the Federation, and who have direct or indirect connections with terrorists'. Onasa news agency report, 12 October 2001. Press. The report in question is ICG Balkans Report No. 118, *The Wages of Sin: Confronting Bosnia's Republika Srpska*, 8 October 2001.

In fact, it has been the determined resistance of the RS leadership to any and all schemes to endow Bosnia with the laws, agencies and competencies required by any real state that has helped make Bosnia so vulnerable to accusations that it is soft on terrorism.

### D. ASSESSING AND MEETING THE THREAT

Early inclinations on the part of Bosnians and resident foreign officials alike, first, to dismiss the terrorist threat in Bosnia and, then, to exaggerate it, have now passed. Both SFOR and the Americans seem to have felt initially that Bosnian leaders and institutions were either asleep at the wheel or criminally incompetent. The tendency of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) and other international civilian agencies also at first to deprecate the damage which the media assault on and in Bosnia was doing to the country's (and their own) reputations may also have aroused SFOR and U.S. ire. Since early October, however, there appears to have been a steadying of nerves, a coordination of efforts and a harmonisation of views on the relative seriousness of the threat in and to Bosnia.

Although middle-level foreign intelligence sources (whose ranks have reportedly been much augmented since 11 September) remain prone both to alarmism and to talking down Bosnian efforts to fight the war on terror, senior international representatives have become more relaxed about the threat and complimentary regarding the degree and effectiveness of Bosnian cooperation in meeting it.<sup>54</sup> Assessments of the risk thus vary from high and imminent (with dates, targets and means specified) to low but real (given Bosnia's unique historical circumstances, vulnerable location and ex-mujahidin presence).

Some international sources opine that Bosnia is no more dangerous than any other Balkan state or any other place in the world. Others contend that it is more likely to serve as a transit zone for men, weapons or money intended for use elsewhere than as a venue for terrorist attacks. Yet the brief closure of the U.S., British and Dutch embassies in mid-October, and the continuing rumours of foiled

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<sup>54</sup> Extensive ICG interviews in Sarajevo, October and November 2001.

or intended strikes against U.S. SFOR bases, highlight the counter-indicative facts that Bosnia both offers tempting Western targets and possesses strong international defences.

What it has patently lacked are strong internal defences. The SFOR view is that it was compelled in the immediate aftermath of 11 September to take unilateral action in hunting down and detaining potential terrorists on the basis of intelligence it could not share with the Bosnian police. After two or three weeks, however, as the Bosnians got their act together, it became possible to share both information and responsibility for apprehending and deporting dubious individuals, so deflecting mounting press criticism of SFOR for exceeding its legitimate powers.

According to data collected by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), nineteen arrests in connection with suspected terrorism were made in Bosnia between 11 September and 30 October 2001. Nine of these persons have been deported. Another seventeen persons are reportedly being shadowed by the police. OHCHR has expressed concern over the lack of transparency in the application of arrest, detention, repatriation, extradition, and judicial procedures in these cases.<sup>55</sup>

But it is not just SFOR and, latterly, its helpmates in the Federation Ministry of Internal Affairs (MUP) that are alleged to have been insufficiently respectful of the niceties of civil rights and due process. OHCHR has also been up in arms over the rush to impose a package of five new or amended counter-terrorist laws on the Council of Ministers (CoM). Driven by American concerns and drafted by a working party based in the OHR Legal Department and representing both selected embassies and the 'principals' (OSCE, OHR, UNMIBH and UNHCR), the 'anti-terrorist package' was presented to the CoM on 17 October, despite protests from OHCHR and UNHCR. The latter agencies have objected that the proposed measures fall short of international human rights standards, probably violate the international

conventions incorporated in Bosnia's constitution, and have been hurriedly and incompetently drafted by an ad hoc body that has cut across the work of the long-established UN working party on legal reform. The view of the OHCHR head of office is that such legislation will do significant damage to the rule of law, to human rights and to the reputation of the international community in Bosnia.<sup>56</sup>

The seriousness with which Bosnians have come to take the war on terrorism – as well as the threats it poses and the opportunities it promises – was revealed by an extraordinary but little-remarked event on 24 September. For the first time since Dayton, all Bosnia's state and entity leaders met officially round a single table to elaborate a joint anti-terrorist campaign and to nominate a team to lead the struggle. That such a gathering took place – and that both an action plan and an anti-terrorism supremo emerged from it – were perhaps more significant than the rudiments of the plan itself.<sup>57</sup>

This envisaged a five-part program to extend the State Border Service's control over the 25 per cent of Bosnia's frontiers not already covered; to complete the review of passports issued to foreigners; to adopt the laws necessary to implement the long-mooted CIPS (Citizen Information Protection System) project and other measures against organised crime; to review the bank accounts of suspect humanitarian organisations; and to assume control over Bosnian air space.<sup>58</sup>

The politicians and the press soon reverted to pursuing their disparate agendas and playing their

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<sup>55</sup> ICG interview with OHCHR, 2 November 2001. For a highly circumstantial account of the arrests and deportations to date, see Adnan Buturovic, 'Nakon sto je uhapseno privih pet, otvorene su Americka i Britanska ambasada u Sarajevu!', *Slobodna Bosna*, 25 October 2001, pp 5-7.

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<sup>56</sup> ICG interview with OHCHR, 2 November 2001. In brief, the OHCHR objects to the use of citizenship, immigration and asylum legislation to combat terrorism. It likewise opposes the use of the criminal justice system to underwrite administrative detention and argues that the proposed state of emergency law is ill written and falls foul of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

<sup>57</sup> Azhar Kalamujic, 'Provjere racuna u bh. bankama i kontrola stranih humanitaraca u BiH', *Oslobodjenje*, 25 September 2001.

<sup>58</sup> Emir Habul, 'Bauk terorizma ujedinjuje politicare', AIM Sarajevo, 28 September 2001. The establishment of a landing card system for foreigners arriving at Bosnia's international airports and the elaboration of a new visa system were soon added to the package.

self-interested games; but at a deeper level the war on terrorism appeared to have compelled Bosnian politicians to realise that they would sink or swim together.

The Coordination Team for the War against Terrorism was set up under Deputy Foreign Minister Ivica Misić. It has since met weekly and has been attended by RS and Federation ministers, as well as by senior international community representatives. According to Misić, the team has won the confidence of foreign agencies, which provide it with '101 per cent' of its intelligence.

The contribution of RS ministers has been loyal but slight, while that of their entity's intelligence service has been nil. Nor have the Federation's two intelligence agencies been of any help. Misić, for example, has requested files on such matters as the roles of Islamic NGOs and the mujahidin-inspired Active Islamic Youth (AIO) from the Bosniak Agency for Research and Documentation (AID), but has been denied.<sup>59</sup>

This state of affairs reflects the fact that Bosnia's three intelligence agencies have long been under the control of their founding political parties: the SDS in the RS, the HDZ in 'Herceg-Bosna' and the SDA in former ABiH areas. The RS intelligence agency works with and is paid by Belgrade, but does not report to Ivanić, let alone to Sarajevo. The Bosnian Croat National Security Service (SNS) has been in disarray since Croatia cut off funding in 2000 and the Bosnian HDZ was ejected from many of its bastions of power this year. Meanwhile, the Bosniak AID has remained under SDA control until now, notwithstanding the coming to power of the Alliance for Change following the November 2000 elections. It is

assumed, moreover, that there are many supporters of AIO among AID's 500-plus employees.

The Alliance had drafted a law providing for a unified Federation security service, but had not dared to take over either AID or SNS before 11 September. Opposition by former SDA leaders in the Party for BiH (SzBiH) is usually cited as the main reason. Well-informed sources also report that the SDA had instructed AID to take no constructive action in the fight against terrorism. Given that one of the agency's main purposes has been to cover up or play down the SDA's wartime links and financial dealings with volatile Islamic groups or countries, this prohibition is hardly surprising.

In the continuing absence of new legislation, the two Federation agencies remain separately responsible to the Bosniak (Beriz Belkić) and Croat (Jozo Krizanović) members of the state presidency. SzBiH control not only of the Bosniak seat on the presidency, but also of the Federation MUP and senior police posts appears to have stymied action to bring AID to heel. Intense U.S. pressure on CoM chair Zlatko Lagumdžija following 11 September proved necessary to break this deadlock. Only on 2 November did Belkić and Krizanović announce the appointment of new heads of the two agencies, their common assignment being to purge and unify their services in as short order as possible.<sup>60</sup>

The new AID and SNS chiefs, Munir Alibabić and Ivan Vukasić, will confront enormous difficulties remaking their agencies as professional, competent and law-abiding servants of the Federation, rather than defenders of their founder-parties' divergent interests. In fact, AID and SNS have heretofore regarded the other as their principal enemy. The well-advertised appointment of Alibabić will, in any case, have afforded AID operatives more than ample opportunity to shred, burn and doctor files. Although promises of adequate funding have been

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<sup>59</sup> ICG interview with Ivica Misić, 5 November 2001. Five Islamic NGOs are being investigated by the Federation Financial Police. Those most often mentioned as past or present conduits for money which may be financing would-be terrorists include the Saudi High Commission for Relief, the Islamic Relief Agency and TWRA. AIO, for its part, is widely regarded as propagating Wahabi-style activism among young people. It is particularly active in the Zenica and Bugojno areas. Its web site can be accessed at [www.aiobih.org](http://www.aiobih.org). The Saudi High Commission's denials of complicity in terrorism and complaints of persecution can be read in Senad Slatina, 'Bosnu i Hercegovinu smo pomogli sa 800 miliona maraka', *Slobodna Bosna*, 25 October 2001, pp 11, 16-17.

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<sup>60</sup> 'Alibabić i Vukasić najavili zajednički rad AID-a i SNS-a', *Oslobodjenje*, 3 November 2001. Their unification is supposed to take place within six months, but this is unlikely to prove possible. Because SzBiH leaders share a wartime past, secrets and sense of Bosniak solidarity with their former colleagues in the SDA, they have been inclined to let the AID dog lie peacefully.

made to the two new directors, this, too, will be hard to deliver.<sup>61</sup>

## E. CONCLUSION

Two months into the war on terror, a measure of concord has broken out in Bosnia. Senior Bosnian and international functionaries agree that the country has real problems, but also that the risk of outrages occurring there is low. Local media and politicians are no longer in denial; but neither are they hyping the terrorism threat – unlike the international media.

Cooperation between domestic and foreign leaders is good at the political level, if not at the operational level. Republika Srpska remains aloof and self-interested, but it was ever thus. The Council of Ministers will likely move to enact the package of counter-terrorist legislation prepared for it by the ‘principals’, but may now have established its anti-terrorist credentials to an extent sufficient to permit it to reject or modify some of the more problematic provisions of these drafts. If so, Bosnia will have assumed its appropriately modest place in the anti-terror coalition.

## IV. CROATIA

The day after the attacks on New York and Washington, President Stipe Mesic addressed the nation, saying ‘it was not only the U.S. that was attacked, but the whole democratic and civilised world’.<sup>62</sup> Prime Minister Ivica Racan and members of his government signed a book of condolence at the Croatian—U.S. Friendship Society. Expressing Croatia’s solidarity with the American people, Racan said: ‘We in Croatia know all too well how difficult it is to be exposed to terrorism, aggression, and what it looks like to be faced with the difficult consequences.’<sup>63</sup> Following the example of the European Union, 14 September was declared a day of mourning.

In the immediate aftermath, it was announced that the police were securing all embassies and consulates and that border controls had been intensified.<sup>64</sup> A government crisis headquarters was established under First Deputy Prime Minister Goran Granic.<sup>65</sup>

### A. FEAR OF EXCLUSION

As the international response to the attacks took shape, Croatian officials and media commentators turned their attention to the longer-term implications. As usual, their chief anxiety was that Croatia might be lumped back with its Balkan neighbours and removed even farther from Western Europe. Racan himself warned of the risk that toughened border regimes within the EU would amount to a protective ‘cordon sanitaire’ that risked isolating Croatia from the West.

Commentators and officials alike cast around for measures that would help ensure that Croatia would not end up on the ‘wrong side’ of any new barrier.<sup>66</sup> One newspaper noted that ‘Croatia does not want to find itself aligned with countries where, for example, Islamic fanatics and terrorists move around more or less freely. Bosnia and Herzegovina is, in practice, just such a country’.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. See also, Sead Avdic, ‘Jos uvijek vladaju Alija Izetbegovic i Mujo Kalosa!’, *Slobodna Bosna*, 25 October 2001, pp 20-21, and ‘Munir Alibabic’, *BH Dani*, 2 November 2001, p 13.

<sup>62</sup> Croatian television, 12 September 2001.

<sup>63</sup> Croatian television, 13 September 2001.

<sup>64</sup> Croatian television, 12 September 2001.

<sup>65</sup> *Jutarnji list*, 20 September 2001.

<sup>66</sup> *Jutarnji list*, 16 and 17 September 2001.

<sup>67</sup> *Vjesnik*, 17 September 2001.

Some newspaper opinion polls have indicated a rising level of intolerance among Croats towards Muslims since 11 September.<sup>68</sup>

The Chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Policy Committee, Zdravko Tomac, a senior party colleague of Racan's noted for nationalist leanings, said that the danger of being consigned to a 'Western Balkan' sphere had suddenly become more serious because of the rising international tensions. He added that 'we are facing a great challenge. This is our 'to be or not to be'. We must do everything we can to tie ourselves to Central Europe and to minimise our Balkans dimension'.

## **B. INTO THE COALITION**

Concerns were also expressed that Croatia's aspirations for integration into the EU might be set back.<sup>69</sup> Others argued that fears of increased isolation were exaggerated, and Croatia should concentrate on increasing security in the region, including through active participation in the developing international coalition against terrorism. Concretely, Racan said Croatia should contribute in two ways: by cooperating with the international community and by fighting domestic intolerance and violence.<sup>70</sup> The fears of deepening isolation were soothed when the U.S. ambassador to Croatia welcomed Zagreb's promise to contribute to the international coalition.

A specific suggestion was that Croatia should share intelligence information about the activities of terrorist groups in the Balkans, notably in Bosnia, which hosted foreign Islamic fighters during the war, some of whom stayed in the country.<sup>71</sup> Croatia's ability to contribute in this way stems from its involvement in the conflict in Bosnia, but also because of the suspected involvement of Croatian citizens in arming terrorist organisations including the Irish Republican Army (IRA).<sup>72</sup> Foreign Minister Tonino Picula said that a task force had been established to follow the

reactions of the international community so that appropriate help could be offered.<sup>73</sup>

## **C. AN UNLIKELY TARGET**

Another recurrent concern has been Croatia's own vulnerability. While generally deeming itself too insignificant to be an attractive target, the country has experienced sporadic terrorist violence. Bosnia recently extradited Abdal Isendar to Croatia, amid reports that he is actually Hassan Al Sharif Mohammad Sejjid, who was charged with planting a car bomb in Rijeka in 1995 and is wanted on terrorism charges also in Egypt. Al Sharif is allegedly a member of Gamaa Al Islamia, an Egyptian terrorist organisation blamed for the bombing of the New York World Trade Centre in 1993. Gamaa Al Islamia apparently considers Croatia responsible for the disappearance of one of its prominent figures. Fresh threats against the country were reportedly made in October 2000.<sup>74</sup>

There have also been allegations that associates of Osama bin Laden may have been active in Croatia during the war in Bosnia, at a time when several Islamic charitable organisations were operating in the country and weapons from Islamic countries were smuggled through Croatia to Bosnia.<sup>75</sup> While it is highly likely that arms were smuggled through Croatia in this way, the involvement of agents of Osama bin Laden is unproven.

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<sup>68</sup> *Vecernji list*, 21 October 2001.

<sup>69</sup> *Jutarnji list*, 18 September 2001.

<sup>70</sup> Croatian television, 17 September 2001.

<sup>71</sup> Commentary in *Vjesnik*, 20 September 2001.

<sup>72</sup> *Jutarnji list*, 18 September 2001.

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<sup>73</sup> *Jutarnji list*, 23 September 2001.

<sup>74</sup> *Vjesnik*, 22 September 2001.

<sup>75</sup> *Vjesnik*, 27 September 2001 and *Jutarnji list*, 28 September 2001.

## V. KOSOVO

Immediately following the attacks on 11 September, the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) increased its force-protection measures. These were subsequently relaxed, presumably when KFOR and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo failed to identify any 'clear and present' danger or threat to the international community from Islamist terrorism in Kosovo.

### A. KOSOVO ALBANIAN RESPONSE

The 11 September atrocities produced spontaneous expressions of sympathy from Kosovo Albanians, who believe that U.S. support is the main factor in their escape from Serbian domination and approach towards self-determination. Newspapers and television stations urged citizens to attend rallies across Kosovo on 12 September. Silent throngs bearing candles were addressed by local leaders, representatives of the United Nations and the United States.<sup>76</sup>

The Kosovo Transitional Council (KTC) denounced the terrorist attack and invited all Kosovo residents to express their solidarity with the American people. The KTC described the attacks as 'against the values of civilisation'.<sup>77</sup> Discussion at the weekly KTC meeting on 12 September was dedicated entirely to events in the U.S. Kole Berisha, a member from Ibrahim Rugova's Democratic League of Kosova (LDK), stated: 'The attack against the U.S.A. is an attack against democracy, as well as against the values of international civilisation. Experience has shown

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<sup>76</sup> The relevant international administrators all released statements condemning terror and thanking the people of Kosovo for their support in the fight against anti-democratic forces. On 25 September, an article by Ambassador John Menzies, who heads the U.S. mission in Kosovo, was published in all Albanian-language newspapers. Menzies concluded: 'To all our friends and supporters in Kosovo, I thank you again from the bottom of my heart for the incredible support you have shown for America and the thousands of innocent victims murdered in the carnage of 11 September. Just as we stood with you during your darkest hour, so have you stood with us during ours. Now we must all stand together for the struggle ahead, for this will be the ultimate test'.

<sup>77</sup> KosovaLive 12 September 2001

thus far that those who use violence are the biggest losers'. Hajredin Kuci, representing the Democratic Party of Kosova (PDK), called on all ethnic Albanians to show solidarity with the American people especially in view of their obligation: 'Neither the KTC nor the people of Kosova would be in the situation we are without U.S. policy'. Lastly, Ramush Haradinaj, leader of the Alliance for the Future of Kosova, was quoted as saying 'an official day of mourning has been called to share the feelings of the American people'.<sup>78</sup>

The Kosovo Protection Corps (TMK), led by Agim Ceku, organised a drive to send blood to America. Within a day of the attacks, it was delivered to KFOR's Camp Bondsteel. The Kosova Lottery donated 10 per cent of the total proceeds for the week of 23-30 September to the victims of the terrorist attacks.

### B. MEDIA

A report originating from a Bosnian news agency quoted Rada Trajkovic, a Serb representative on the KTC, as follows: 'After the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, only those who are against terrorism, violence and attacks against Orthodox believers in Kosova have remained with the Americans.' She allegedly added that 'bin Laden's people have infiltrated to the top of the Kosovo Protection Corps'.<sup>79</sup>

UNMIK spokesperson Susan Manuel denied that Trajkovic had uttered these words in the KTC. The Albanian-language media did not pursue this story. Nor, on the whole, have they shown keen interest in reprinting and reacting to Serbian and Macedonian media allegations about ethnic Albanian ties to bin Laden. When an ITAR-TASS bulletin quoted LDK leader Rugova as claiming that KLA forces 'are ready to organise acts of terrorism for the purpose of supporting Osama bin Laden', Rugova denounced the story as a fabrication,<sup>80</sup> and the allegation faded away.

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<sup>78</sup> All statements from KosovaLive 12 September 2001

<sup>79</sup> KosovaLive 20 September 2001.

<sup>80</sup> RFE/RL Newline Southeastern Europe, 26 September 2001.

### **C. THE CONFUSING SEMANTICS OF 'TERRORISM'**

The meaning of terrorism in Kosovo is bitterly contested. During the Milosevic era, 'separatist-terrorist' was a term applied routinely by Serbian media and politicians to all ethnic Albanians who did not accept Serbian rule in its totality. In practice, this meant the entire ethnic Albanian community. The fact that relatively few acts of violence were perpetrated by Kosovo Albanians until the late 1990s did nothing to dent the conviction among Serbs that 'terrorism' was an appropriate term.

When NATO bombed Yugoslavia in 1999 in the name of upholding the rights of ethnic Albanians, many Serbs – influenced by their own propaganda and nationalist myths -- believed that terrorist means were now being used to protect terrorists. Yet it was Kosovo Serbs who suffered what was probably the closest example in the region to bin Laden-style terrorism: the carefully planned, remote control explosion of a bus carrying civilians near Podujevo on 16 February 2001. The murder and abduction of up to 1,300 Serbs since June 1999 has confirmed, in Serb eyes, that terrorism is intrinsic to ethnic Albanian ambitions in Kosovo.

For Kosovo Albanians, on the other hand, terrorism was a fair description of what the Milosevic regime was doing to them, before and especially after the removal of Kosovo's provincial autonomy in 1989. While local Kosovo leaders roundly condemned the atrocity of 16 February 2001, the murders and abductions of ethnic Serbs are, in most Albanians' eyes, understandable acts of revenge which in no way discredit the political project of independence from Serbia.

For the international community, sitting between the two communities, the nature of local terrorism has altered over time. U.S. senior envoy Robert Gelbard echoed official Belgrade by using the term 'terrorists' to describe the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1998. The following year, however, when the Western powers refused to accept Milosevic's rejection of a settlement for Kosovo, the NLA became NATO's ally and beneficiary. From summer 1999 until 11 September 2001, Washington and its allies were locally perceived – not only by Serbs – as dangerously tolerant of ethnic Albanian extremism. Of course, this

tolerance was not doctrinal; it was the result of reluctance to risk NATO forces to prevent and punish interethnic crimes in Kosovo.

At the same time, the replacement of the Milosevic regime in autumn 2000 helped to distract Serbs from dwelling on the memory of KLA or even NATO 'terrorism'. Two developments in particular need to be mentioned. Belgrade's partnership with NATO and the European Union to peacefully resolve the uprising in southern Serbia in spring 2001 was welcomed as proof that the international community was not invariably 'pro-Albanian'. Secondly, widespread reporting of mass graves of ethnic Albanians murdered by Serbian forces has made it more difficult for Serbian society to ignore the atrocities perpetrated by the Milosevic regime.

The 11 September attacks may have had a locally beneficial effect, by driving Washington to clarify its position on ethnic Albanian violence in Kosovo and Macedonia. On 15 October 2001, the U.S. head of mission in Kosovo demarched the main Kosovo Albanian leaders, Ibrahim Rugova, Hashim Thaci and Ramush Haradinaj. According to subsequent press statements, a crucial portion of the message went as follows: 'It is important that the NLA understands ... that any provocative acts by armed Albanian groups would be seen by the U.S. as support for terrorist forces'.<sup>81</sup> Senior international sources told ICG that the Kosovo Albanian leaders were left in no uncertainty that 'the previous ambiguity in American policy, over the difference between 'extremism' and 'terrorism', is no longer there.'<sup>82</sup>

### **D. 'RECONSTRUCTION' AS ISLAMISATION**

Half a century of officially encouraged atheism, against an historical background of markedly heterodox Islam, has rendered ethnic Albanians fairly indifferent to religion. Among Kosovo Albanians, the level of religious observance is

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<sup>81</sup> This message was in effect a follow-up to the Bush Administration's executive orders on 27 June 2001, banning 23 ethnic Albanian 'extremists' from visiting the U.S. and fundraising or money transfers from the U.S. to those individuals or to specified organisations including the National Liberation Army (NLA) from Macedonia and the Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovic (UCPMB) from southern Serbia.

<sup>82</sup> ICG interviews in Pristina, 20-21 October 2001.

lower than among ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and Montenegro. While there is no more likelihood here than in Bosnia of wide support for anti-Western Islamist extremism, some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are active in Kosovo thanks to Saudi, Kuwaiti or other Gulf state money should be carefully monitored. More than 30 Islamic NGOs are present in Kosovo. The United Arab Emirates has pledged millions of dollars to build some 50 mosques around Kosovo.

A number of these are regarded by KFOR as having links to terrorist circles elsewhere and as employing individuals suspected of having criminal records. KFOR military intelligence runs an ongoing investigation into what it calls 'suspicious' NGOs. Between 19 and 22 July, U.S. troops arrested four Iranian nationals attached to a medical relief organisation in Pristina on the ground that they presented a threat to Kosovo's safe and secure environment. Following diplomatic pressure from Teheran, the four were released by mid September.<sup>83</sup>

Here as in Bosnia, however, local people are more concerned about what they consider the religious radicalism and cultural vandalism practised by some of these groups, such as the Saudi Joint Relief Committee for Kosovo, than about potential terrorism. Under cover of 'reconstruction', a number of traditional Islamic architectural features have been obliterated.<sup>84</sup> One local expert from the Institution for Protection of Kosova Monuments has been quoted as follows: 'The Saudis say NATO and the UN will let them do whatever they want, and that we Albanians have nothing to say about it. The Serbs killed us physically, but these fanatics want to kill our cultural heritage.'<sup>85</sup>

According to KFOR officials, some of these NGOs pay leading members of the community to attend the mosque, and also reward women for wearing the veil, for example by offering free courses in computing, sewing, English and Arabic.

## E. CONCLUSION

ICG has argued elsewhere that only local police are capable of establishing interethnic security in Kosovo.<sup>86</sup> The same may hold for anti-terrorist action. Although the commander of KFOR has dismissed the possibility of sharing intelligence with the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), it is strongly arguable that such cooperation – which has begun in Bosnia – will be a precondition of keeping Kosovo safe from terrorist networks.

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<sup>83</sup> ICG interviews in Kosovo, October 2001.

<sup>84</sup> See Michael A. Sells, 'Erasing Culture: Wahhabism, Buddhism, Balkan Mosques', text dated 2 April 2001, available at <http://www.haverford.edu/relg/sells/reports/WahhabismBuddhasBegova.htm>

<sup>85</sup> See Stephen Schwartz, 'A certain exhaustion' in *The New Criterion*, October 2000. See also ICG Balkans Report No. 105, *Religion in Kosovo*, 31 January 2001.

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<sup>86</sup> 'Only a local police force, with local knowledge, acting under local political direction – backed by international support – will stand a chance of protecting the remaining Serbs ... over time.' See ICG Balkans Report No. 108, *After Milosevic*, 26 April 2001, p. 87.



## VI. MACEDONIA

As a Balkan country with a significant Muslim population,<sup>87</sup> a very recent experience of armed insurgency, a significant Western military and political presence, and poor internal security, Macedonia might appear highly vulnerable to infiltration and action by terrorist networks.

According to some Macedonian politicians and Macedonian-language media, this possibility is already a certainty. Wild and unproven allegations linking the local ethnic Albanian rebel force, the NLA, with bin Laden and 'mujahidin' were published and broadcast in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks.<sup>88</sup> This has reinforced the image of the NLA as a terrorist organisation and refreshed resentment at the international community for compelling the government to pursue compromise rather than confrontation. In this way, the 'war on terrorism' has had an unfortunate impact on the peace process in Macedonia, aiding those who seek to scuttle the package of constitutional reforms and amnesty agreed on 13 August 2001<sup>89</sup> and return the country to the verge of conflict.

U.S. officials in Skopje say there is no evidence to link Macedonian Albanian factions with bin

Laden.<sup>90</sup> Overall, the international response to Macedonian attempts to use the terrorism issue for partisan purposes has been sharp. The alleged linkage with bin Laden has been dismissed.<sup>91</sup> On 19 September, U.S. envoy James Pardew and U.S. Ambassador Einik expressed outrage at efforts 'to take advantage of America's tragedy'. EU and NATO officials also have supported this line, cautioning the ethnic Macedonians not to exploit the events as a reason to hold up passage of the constitutional amendments agreed on 13 August.

Whatever the lack of evidence of a nexus between bin Laden, Islamist terrorism and NLA leader Ali Ahmeti, the perception remains firmly planted in ethnic Macedonian public consciousness that the NLA is a terrorist organisation. And Macedonian leaders continue to reiterate that the world-wide war against terrorism must incorporate their own domestic struggles.

### A. GOVERNMENT AGAINST TERRORISM

On 17 September 2001, parliament passed a 'Declaration against Terrorism' not only expressing solidarity with the American people, but proclaiming, in language that is locally loaded, Macedonia's 'special awareness of these tragic events as it itself is a victim of terrorism for the past seven months.' Echoing a previously declared project of the speaker of parliament, the powerful Stojan Andov, parliament also proposed an 'anti-terrorist regional pact'.

Ethnic Albanian parties did not support the proposed 'anti-terrorist regional pact'. Overall, ethnic Albanian leaders have been muted on the terrorism allegations – either denying them, or proclaiming their full willingness to consider any proof brought by the international community. This stance probably reflects confidence that at the moment, international pressure is firmly on the

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<sup>87</sup> The (predominantly Muslim) ethnic Albanian population of Macedonia is widely believed to be much higher than the 22.5 per cent registered in the 1994 census. However, this statistic will not be reliably established until a new census has been held under international supervision, as called for by the Framework Agreement of 13 August 2001.

<sup>88</sup> The daily *Vest* alleged (19 September 2001) that mujahidin were responsible for the killing of eight Macedonian soldiers in April; the daily *Dnevnik* alleged (19 September 2001) that a mujahidin had plotted to blow up Skopje's main police station in 1999, was arrested but released due to strong pressure by the main ethnic Albanian political party, the DPA; *Dnevnik* then claimed (21 September 2001) that a new Taliban was under construction in the Balkans, with the knowledge and support of the West. Sitel TV station reported (19 September 2001) that bin Laden collaborators were operating in Macedonia with the NLA, and (21 September 2001) that mujahidin from Saudi Arabia and Egypt were masterminding NLA operations in Macedonia.

<sup>89</sup> See ICG Balkans Briefing, *Macedonia: War on Hold*, 15 August 2001.

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<sup>90</sup> The Ministry of Interior officially shares information on terrorism, but senior international officials say the material shared has been of little value. One described this material as comprising 'lists of names of men with beards'. ICG interviews in Skopje, November 2001.

<sup>91</sup> For example, on 9 October, Janet Bogue, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, said publicly that she knew of no evidence that there were 'bin Laden training camps in Macedonia'. See <http://www.uspolicy.be/Issues/Balkans/mac.101301.htm>.

ethnic Macedonian leaders to implement the 13 August Framework Agreement.

On 8 October, President Boris Trajkovski made a strong statement of support for the U.S. and its position on terrorism. Three days earlier, however, addressing a Euro-Atlantic Security Conference in Sofia, Trajkovski had said:

Shortly after the attacks on 11 September, President George Bush said that we must target 'terrorists with a global reach'. I would add that we must ... target terrorists wherever they are and whatever their reach. Because even if 'local' terrorists don't expand their reach to a global level, they must be stopped by the collective actions of the international community as their tactics and methods will be used by others [and] send a signal to all terrorists wherever they are.<sup>92</sup>

These remarks reflected a deep suspicion among ethnic Macedonians that the 'war on terrorism' confirms Western double standards, excluding as it does Macedonia's own 'terrorists', namely the ethnic Albanian rebels of the (now officially disbanded) National Liberation Army, the NLA. Macedonians remember that Western leaders themselves called the NLA terrorists during much of the first half of 2001, until they decided that the government had to negotiate a historic compromise with them.<sup>93</sup>

Even before 11 September, the main governing ethnic Macedonian party, VMRO-DPMNE,<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Quoted in *Dnevnik*, 6 October 2001.

<sup>93</sup> Western leaders who, according to media reports, publicly used the word 'terrorism' or 'terrorist' when condemning the ethnic Albanian rebels in Macedonia during March 2001 included German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping; French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine; Javier Solana, High Representative of the EU for the Common Foreign and Security Policy; Lord Robertson, the NATO Secretary-General; UK Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, and, collectively, the six nations of the Contact Group (U.S., Russia, UK, France, Germany and Italy). The Bush Administration used the term as late as 27 June 2001; see 'Statement by Press Secretary: Bush Acts to Isolate, Cut Support to Extremists in the Balkans', available at <http://www.alliedbe/usa/president/s20010627d.html>.

<sup>94</sup> VMRO-DPMNE stands in Macedonian for Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation—Democratic Party for Macedonian Unity.

invoked the terrorism theme, most notably in a high profile attempt to sack the Minister of Justice – an ethnic Albanian – for failing to demand the extradition from Germany of the suspected culprit in a deadly attack on a police station.

## **B. BACKGROUND**

In order to understand the current obsession with terrorism and how politicians and media have exploited it, the popular understanding of 'terrorism' in Macedonia must be clarified.

Reluctant to examine the deeper roots of the conflict in their country, and to acknowledge either legitimate ethnic Albanian grievances or the largely corrupt way of dealing with them for much of the past decade, many Macedonians are convinced that the conflict was wholly 'imported' by 'outside terrorists'. This conviction is reinforced by the fact that fighting in Macedonia – in contrast to Kosovo – erupted without a background of lengthy escalation or an obvious growth of extremism. Consequently, ethnic Macedonians have looked outside the country to explain its origin. Many see the Kosovo crisis – and the failure of the UN and KFOR to crack down on Albanian extremism and criminality and to control Kosovo's borders – as *the* principal source of their conflict with ethnic Albanians.

This means that the ubiquitous label for the NLA – 'terrorists' – has great resonance for a public stunned by the fighting and the swift deterioration of interethnic relations. And without obvious atrocities against ethnic Albanians, there is nothing to balance the dominant image of the recent conflict for most ethnic Macedonians: the grisly pictures, first on television, then available for viewing on the Internet, of Macedonian troops mutilated (by NLA 'terrorists') following an ambush.

Rather than feeling reassured by the Framework Agreement signed at Ohrid on 13 August, many ethnic Macedonians retain the conviction that the international community is biased and hypocritical. Lord Robertson's memorable, pre-Ohrid epithet for the NLA – 'thugs' – is too fresh to be forgotten. Ethnic Macedonians frequently cite a decade's worth of international praise given to Macedonia, and its constitution, as a 'model of multiethnicity'. The public thanks by key officials, including

President Clinton, for Macedonia's support to ethnic Albanian refugees in 1999 is also remembered.

Thus, most Macedonians believe they have never deviated notably from the right path. And they cite as justification that they largely accepted the political *and* economic prescriptions of the international community, until the insurrection earlier this year drew them into international disfavour.<sup>95</sup>

Macedonians take a bitter view, therefore, of the role that the international community including NATO, the EU and the U.S. has played during the crisis. Not only many members of the public, but senior officials in government, fantasise that without international pressure for a compromise the Macedonian army and police would have 'taken care' of the ethnic Albanians.

### C. MEDIA

From mid September, the Macedonian-language media have been replete with stories linking the NLA with bin Laden and mujahidin. Newspapers and television repeated the same themes: that the NLA was cooperating with bin Laden in training and finances; that mujahidin were an active component of the NLA – even responsible for atrocities perpetrated on Macedonian forces in the village of Vejce; and that terrorism remains a continuing danger to the country. Although the frequency and prominence of the stories has diminished, they have not disappeared. On 6 October 2001, Macedonian Television suggested that an ethnic Albanian sought to assassinate Prime Minister Georgievski with a car filled with explosives.

Even more than in Bosnia these allegations are politically driven and immune to sober refutation. Experienced observers believe the police and security services are providing material to selected media, such as SITEL television, to make their

allegations of mujahidin involvement in the NLA look more plausible.

The emergence of this 'participatory' or 'patriotic journalism' is a serious obstacle to reconciliation and stability. While the ultimate aims and backers of these media outlets remain unclear, the emergence of a coalition known as the 'Media Front' suggests a concerted effort to utilise the full power of selected media, including as an organiser of public sentiment, to undermine the Ohrid Agreement and the international community's efforts.

Albanian-language media – which are certainly no more professional – have denounced the 'irresponsibility' of their Macedonian-language counterparts. This stance of superiority reflects, again, the ethnic Albanians' sense that, until the parliament has ratified the Ohrid Agreement, the onus of international pressure will remain firmly on ethnic Macedonian shoulders.

Interestingly, while the post-11 September media campaign might have been expected to align Macedonia with the international coalition against terror (albeit at the expense of ethnic Albanians), some prominent media have sought instead to further undermine the image of the West. For example, *Dnevnik* and other outlets have sounded the theme that the West is sponsoring terror groups in Kosovo.<sup>96</sup> This has the effect of weakening support for the West-backed Ohrid accords even further.

### D. CONCLUSION

The international warnings to the ethnic Macedonian community and expressions of outrage at its leaders' attempt to distort the anti-terrorism drive for partisan purposes appear to have only limited effect. Ethnic Macedonian officials believe the events of 11 September have distracted the U.S. in particular from serious engagement in the region. One senior official told ICG: 'the U.S. has other problems right now'.

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<sup>95</sup> The main exception was President Trajkovski. In his televised speech to parliament formally proposing the Ohrid constitutional amendments, on 31 August 2001, Trajkovski boldly alluded to the past failures to deal with interethnic matters in a straightforward way. See ICG Balkans Briefing, *Macedonia: Filling the Security Vacuum*, 8 September 2001.

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<sup>96</sup> A well-known Macedonian journalist stated to ICG as if it were a fact that 'KLA logistics bases' were still operating in a village in southern Kosovo. Repeated to KFOR intelligence official, this allegation drew laughter. ICG interviews in Skopje, 19 October, and Pristina, 2 November 2001.

Hence, ethnic Macedonian officials have shown greater confidence since 11 September in confronting the international community. The clearest demonstration of this occurred on 19 September, when President Trajkovski reportedly refused to request a new NATO mission unless NATO granted permission for Skopje to receive 31 Soviet-built tanks. NATO reportedly acceded to the request under condition that the tanks would be monitored.<sup>97</sup>

## **VII. MONTENEGRO**

### **A. PRESIDENTIAL RESPONSES**

On 11 September, Montenegrin President Djukanovic received Yugoslav Federal President Vojislav Kostunica in Podgorica. A comparison of their reactions to the attacks in New York and Washington gives a measure of the internal differences that beset the FRY.

Both men discussed the possibility of terrorism spreading to Serbia and Montenegro from Kosovo. Referring to the danger of ethnic Albanian terrorism, Kostunica noted that ‘everything that has happened in our immediate vicinity in recent months elicits concern and indicates that there is a danger of terrorism spreading from Kosovo to the rest of Yugoslavia’. He continued that ‘we have come face to face with a very dangerous ambition to create a new state in the territory of several states, and the danger of terrorism exists because we are being targeted’.

Djukanovic, too, recognised the risk of terrorist activities spreading from Kosovo, but stressed the good inter-ethnic relations that exist within Montenegro. Stating that Kosovo is ‘the central security issue in the Balkans’, he added that ‘it would be naive to think we are completely safe and under no threat of terrorism spreading from Kosovo’. He continued that ‘practice has shown that conflagration has spilled over from Kosovo to Macedonia, and as long as it is aflame there is a danger of it spreading to other parts of the region, and so for that reason Montenegro, which borders Kosovo, is very carefully monitoring everything going on there, in southern Serbia, and in Macedonia’.

However, Djukanovic emphasised that ‘Montenegro has passed the test of multiethnic stability during the recent tumultuous period in the Balkans’. Nevertheless, ‘despite the high level of good relations with the Albanians who live in Montenegro, we cannot deny the possibility that some of the extremists in the region, outside Montenegro, want to ensure that the crisis in the region continues by drawing Montenegro into it, too’.

Kostunica portrayed the terrorist threat as one more reason why the Yugoslav federation should

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<sup>97</sup> ICG interviews with senior international officials.

remain intact. He explained that Serbia and Montenegro are bound by 'the present-day trend that favours integration', as well as (somewhat ironically, given that the biggest terrorist attack in history had just been inflicted on the world's most powerful country) 'by the fact that larger political entities are safer and less vulnerable to terrorist attacks'.<sup>98</sup>

On the day of the attacks, Djukanovic sent a telegram to U.S. President George W. Bush, in which he expressed 'deepest condolences on behalf of the Montenegrin government, its citizens and on his own behalf, in the aftermath of today's grave events caused by irrational terrorist actions'.<sup>99</sup> Following the example of the EU, the Montenegrin Government declared 14 September a day of mourning.<sup>100</sup> The contrast between the Montenegrin government's action in this respect and the lack of a similar gesture by the Yugoslav or Serbian republic governments was noted.<sup>101</sup>

Djukanovic subsequently expressed 'Montenegro's unquestioning readiness to join, within its means, the U.S.-led forces that have declared war on international terrorism'. However, in order to underline that the West should see Montenegro, rather than Belgrade, as its natural ally, Djukanovic took care to remark that not everyone in Yugoslavia had clearly condemned the outrages, asserting that 'messages with openly anti-American overtones' could be heard from some senior figures in Belgrade. He claimed that such reactions were further evidence of the continuing presence of Milosevic's way of thinking among sections of the ruling Belgrade elite.<sup>102</sup>

## **B. MEDIA COVERAGE**

The attacks on the U.S. did not dominate the media for long, as the ongoing political crisis over Montenegro's relationship with Serbia continued to supply drama. This included an abortive attempt to start negotiations between Belgrade and

Podgorica, and further speculation about the formation of a new, broad coalition ('concentration') Montenegrin government.

The biggest controversy for Montenegro immediately arising out of the attacks on the U.S. concerned the decision of an independent television channel, NTV Montena, to invite viewers to phone in answer to the question 'Does the U.S. deserve such retribution'? The question reflects the ambivalence that is still found among some Montenegrins, as among Serbs, towards the U.S. and NATO after the 1999 NATO bombing campaign. The question elicited outraged reactions from many quarters, and the editorial board of NTV Montena apologised for what it conceded had been a grave editorial mistake.<sup>103</sup>

In general, such ambivalence can be found mainly among some supporters of the pro-Yugoslav parties in Montenegro. The leading pro-Yugoslav party, the Socialist People's Party (SNP), was allied to former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević until his fall from power.

The anti-Islamic reporting that has characterised Serbian and Macedonian media coverage of the 'war on terrorism' has not been echoed in the mainstream Montenegrin media. However, the attacks on the U.S. did provide new grist to the mill of pro-Yugoslav media, which have for months been warning of the alleged danger of ethnic Albanian terrorism spreading to Montenegro. Such scare-mongering was reflected in a report by the ITAR-TASS Russian news agency claiming that people close to Osama bin Laden had been training 'Albanian terrorists' at a camp near the border of Kosovo and Southern Serbia, and that terrorist actions were planned for Montenegro, in addition to Kosovo.<sup>104</sup> This report said as much about ITAR-TASS's apparent agenda in the Balkans as about its purported subject.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Tanjug* news agency, 11 September 2001.

<sup>99</sup> TV Montenegro, 11 September 2001.

<sup>100</sup> *Beta* news agency, 13 September 2001.

<sup>101</sup> The Yugoslav foreign minister was asked to comment on this contrast in an interview with the Belgrade daily *Danas*, as reported by the *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 24 September 2001.

<sup>102</sup> TV Montenegro, 26 September 2001.

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<sup>103</sup> *Monitor*, 14 September 2001 and *V.I.P. Daily News Report*, 17 and 19 September 2001. Out of the very small number of people who responded to the question, a majority replied in the affirmative.

<sup>104</sup> *ITAR-TASS* news agency, 2 October 2001.

<sup>105</sup> The Russian agency's anti-Islamic coverage from the Balkans since the launch of the 'war on terrorism' has been noted by Janusz Bugajski in the Croatian weekly, *Nacional*, 4 October 2001.

According to the 1991 census, some 14 per cent of Montenegro's population is Bosniak-Muslim, while a further 7 per cent is ethnic-Albanian, although a significant proportion of Montenegro's Albanians are Roman Catholic rather than Muslim. Religiosity in Montenegro is in general relatively low. While there are devout Muslims, the type of Islamist extremism seen in the Middle East is alien to their traditions, as is the case throughout the Balkans. The relative stability of Montenegro and the fact that it has not been directly affected by war during the last decade, has meant that the factors that might have fomented radical Islam or given foreign radicals a foothold have not been present.

Overall, there has been relatively little tendency to explore the direct consequences of international events for Montenegro, apart from some discussion of how U.S. policy towards the Balkans might be affected. A commentary in *Monitor* concluded that, despite U.S. assurances of continued commitment to the region, it was impossible to predict whether engagement would be stepped up or scaled down. The same article also doubted whether the EU could fill U.S. shoes.<sup>106</sup> On a visit to Montenegro shortly after the attacks, the U.S. ambassador in Belgrade was reported as saying that 'the U.S. government would not neglect the interests and democratic reforms in Montenegro and the resolution of relations between Montenegro and Serbia'.<sup>107</sup>

## VIII. SERBIA

For Serbia's leaders and opinion-makers, the 'war on terrorism' was the first opportunity since Milosevic's defeat to update the country's mythic vocation as 'defender of the West'.<sup>108</sup> And it has been seized with relish. First the press and then politicians revived aggressively anti-Muslim and anti-Albanian language that had been widely used during the wars in Bosnia (1992-95) and Kosovo (1998-99). This language attempted to equate Osama bin Laden with Serbia's ethnic Albanian and Bosniak 'enemies' of the previous decade

### A. MEDIA

The first such story appeared in the nationalist-oriented daily *Glas Javnosti* on 17 September. It claimed there were 15,000 mujahidin in the Balkans, and that the U.S. had sponsored Islam against the Serbs. It openly linked the terrorist actions in New York and Washington to the U.S. sponsorship of Islam in Bosnia, Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia, and included claims that Osama bin Laden had secretly visited Kosovo in 1998 and 1999 as a guest of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The article continued on to question whether there might be new (self-evidently ethnic Albanian) terrorist attacks in the Balkans backed by bin Laden. The connotation was clear: terrorism equals ethnic Albanian separatism.<sup>109</sup>

The newspaper included a large article about the role of Islamist fundamentalists in Bosnia, claiming that Bosniak authorities had issued bin Laden a Bosnian passport, that bin Laden may have been behind a plan to attack the Pope during his 1997 visit to Sarajevo, and that he had also planned an attack on world leaders during the 1999 Stability Pact Summit in Sarajevo.<sup>110</sup> Although a portion of the information in the articles was based loosely on fact, including the references to the continued presence of former mujahidin in Bosnia, it was written in a sensational manner and included many unsubstantiated rumours.

<sup>106</sup> For example, *Monitor*, 28 September 2001, 'Strah od samoće: da li će Amerika smanjiti interesovanje za Balkan'.

<sup>107</sup> BBC Monitoring International Reports, 25 September 2001.

<sup>108</sup> A point made by Zeljko Cvijanovic, IWPR Balkan Crisis Report, 3 October 2001.

<sup>109</sup> 'Opasno vreme za 'svete ratnike'', *Glas javnosti*, 17 September 2001.

<sup>110</sup> 'Strahuju alijini sledbenici', *Glas javnosti*, 17 September 2001.

Federal Defence Minister, Slobodan Krapovic, stated publicly on 20 September that Belgrade had no information that there were followers of bin Laden in Bosnia, Kosovo or Albania.<sup>111</sup> This denial did little good. The press continued with sensational – and often completely untrue – stories about ‘terrorists’. One of the most prominent was a false report carried by the pro-government Belgrade daily *Politika*, to the effect that the moderate Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova had said the KLA was hiding international terrorist bases on territory under its control and was ‘ready to organise terrorist acts to support Osama bin Laden’.<sup>112</sup> Rugova’s immediate denunciation of the report received no press coverage in Serbia.

On 26 September, *Nedeljni Telegraf* had a cover photo of a bearded mujahidin with the headline: ‘Bin Laden’s soldiers in Serbia’. The inside article was directed not only against the ethnic Albanians, but also against the Muslim Slav minority in Serbia’s Sandzak region, adjoining Montenegro.<sup>113</sup> Another issue of *Nedeljni Telegraf* ran the front-page headline ‘Bin Laden has ordered: Open a front in the Balkans to set Europe ablaze’.<sup>114</sup> The tabloid *Eklsuziv* ran a front-page headline claiming ‘Terrorists are entering Belgrade’, while *ID* carried a front page photo of bin Laden with the caption ‘Terrorism continues to threaten Yugoslavia: Balkan footprints of bin Laden’.<sup>115</sup>

*Glas Javnosti* printed a front-page story claiming at least 50 mujahidin were training in the U.S. sector of Kosovo under the command of the brother of Osama bin Laden’s chief of special operations. Harking back to the formation of the German SS Handzar Division from among Bosnia’s Muslims during the Second World War, the article claimed that bin Laden was preparing a new Handzar Division.<sup>116</sup>

## B. POLITICIANS

First to weigh in was Serbia’s Interior Minister, Dusan Mihajlovic, a former Milosevic ally, who claimed in a television interview that his ministry possessed information that bin Laden had two bases in Bosnia and others in Kosovo and Albania. He also stated that bin Laden had been in Bosnia when the Muslims committed war crimes against Serb civilians in the vicinity of Mount Ozren.<sup>117</sup> This was followed the next day by reports in the widely-read *Blic* and *Glas Javnosti* – allegedly based on BBC sources – that bin Laden’s al-Qaida network had active bases in Bosnia, Kosovo and Albania.<sup>118</sup>

These claims reached new dimensions on 20 September when Serbian deputy premier Nebojsa Covic, who manages the combined Yugoslav Federal and Serbian Republic portfolio for Kosovo and southern Serbia, claimed that extremists from southern Serbia were preparing terrorist attacks against Belgrade. Covic stated that they had connections with ethnic Albanian terrorist groups operating out of Kosovo. This assertion – by one of the international community’s favourites in Belgrade – received prominent front-page coverage and was the lead item in several news broadcasts.<sup>119</sup>

Covic then claimed that ‘there were over 10,000 mujahidin in Bosnia and Herzegovina and many still remain – and there are over 3,000 in Kosovo. They are all little bin Ladens’.<sup>120</sup> He connected the alleged impending terrorist attacks on Serbia to the looming U.S. action against Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden.<sup>121</sup> The respected newsweekly *NIN* ran a front page photo of Covic with the caption ‘Belgrade as the target’.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>111</sup> B92, ‘Krapovic: Nema podataka o bin Ladenu’, 20 September 2001.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Rugova: takozvani OVK prikriva teroristicke baze’, *Politika*, 26 September 2001.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Bin ladenovi vojnici u Srbiji’, *Nedeljni telegraf*, 26 September 2001.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Bin Laden naredio: otvorite front na Balkanu da potpalimo Evropu’, *Nedeljni Telegraf*, 3 October 2001.

<sup>115</sup> ‘U Beograd ulaze teroristi’, *Eklsuziv*, 3 October 2001.

‘Prei i dalje terorizam Jugoslaviji: Balkanski tragovi Osame bin Ladena’, *ID*, 26 September 2001.

<sup>116</sup> ‘50 mudzahedina u americkoj zoni’, *Glas Javnosti*, 2 October 2001.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Tragovi Bin Ladena na prostoru bivse SFRJ’, *Glas javnosti*, 19 September 2001.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Al Kaida ima aktivne baze u Bosni, Albaniji, i na Kosmetu’, *Glas javnosti*, 19 September 2001. ‘Al kaida u BiH, na Kosovu i Albaniji’, *Blic*, 19 September 2001.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Covic: teroristi sremni da napadnu Beograd’, *Danas*, 21 September 2001. ‘Covic: ekstremisti s juga Srbije spremaju napade u Beogradu’, *Blic*, 21 September 2001.

<sup>120</sup> ‘Vise od 3000 mudzahedina na Kosovu i Metohiji’, *Glas javnosti*, 22 September 2001.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Policija stiti objekte sirom citave republike’, *Danas*, 22-23 September 2001.

<sup>122</sup> ‘Beograd na meti’, *Nin*, 27 September 2001.

By clearly linking ethnic Albanian separatism in southern Serbia and Kosovo with Osama bin Laden, Covic returned to the Milosevic-era policy of labelling all Albanian 'separatists', meaning the entire ethnic Albanian population, as 'terrorists'. In response to these latest charges, the Interior Ministry announced that it was increasing security at numerous buildings throughout the country to protect against terrorist attacks.<sup>123</sup> These sensationalist media reports provoked an outraged response from the Kosovo Albanian leadership.<sup>124</sup>

At the same time, Federal President Kostunica took the extraordinary step of publicly blaming the U.S. for the background to the 11 September attacks. Washington's wish to 'play the role of world policeman and ... dominate almost all spheres of life' were, he said, 'the true deep roots and the true reasons that triggered the birth of terrorism and its development'.<sup>125</sup> Kostunica also criticised American double standards on terrorism – an accusation that, as mentioned above, resonates with many Serbs and Macedonians.

Even former Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic has, from his confinement in The Hague, sought to jump aboard the anti-terrorism bandwagon. After listening to charges related to Croatia in 1991 and Kosovo in 1999, Milosevic told the bench at the International Criminal Tribunal that 'I have been accused because I defended my nation from the cruel aggression carried out against it and because I defended my people from terrorism'.<sup>126</sup>

On 28 September, the Serbian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights expressed 'deep concern over the revival of hate speech and intolerance', in the form of 'allegations voiced by prominent officials, politicians and media'. These allegations have fuelled a 'dangerous trend ... which adds tension to already precarious relations between the majority people and minorities'.<sup>127</sup>

## C. BACK TO THE PRESENT

Serbia's media and political furore over the 11 September terrorist attacks in the U.S. is far more than simple sensationalist journalism. It is no doubt partly motivated by a desire to sell newspapers. However, it is strikingly reminiscent of Milosevic's propaganda campaign in 1990-1991 that deliberately stirred up nationalist passions and inter-ethnic distrust.<sup>128</sup>

One of the clearest effects of this media blitz is anxiety about potential terrorist attacks on Serbia. An opinion poll taken at the beginning of October 2001 showed only 43.3 per cent of the population now feels safe from terrorist attack.<sup>129</sup> Those polled indicated their greatest concern was in southern Serbia, where the government had earlier in the year – with significant EU, U.S. and NATO support – negotiated a peaceful settlement to end the ethnic Albanian insurgency in the Presevo region.<sup>130</sup> Throughout the insurgency, the Serbian media had depicted the ethnic Albanian insurgents as 'terrorists'.

This artificially generated anxiety will carry over to relations with Muslim Slavs, be they in Bosnia, Montenegro, or Serbia's own Sandzak region. It will no doubt provide fuel for anti-Islamic sentiment, and could fuel anti-Muslim activities in the Sandzak. Because all Muslims – ethnic Albanians and Slavs alike – have been tarred with the brush of terrorism, it may cause Serbian politicians to take less seriously the legitimate grievances of Islamic citizens.

Already this is seen in the Presevo region, which Covic has virtually ignored since the successful negotiation to the end of the insurgency. He has not visited for more than two months. The coordinating body for the south of Serbia lacks representatives from the ministries of culture, economy, justice, and education, and now appears

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<sup>123</sup> 'Pojakan kontrola u celoj zemlji', *Danas*, 24 September 2001.

<sup>124</sup> 'Umesto tenkova izmislijotine', *Danas*, 24 September 2001.

<sup>125</sup> *Politika*, 21 September 2001.

<sup>126</sup> Quoted in *The Guardian*, 30 October 2001.

<sup>127</sup> Serbian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Press Release, 28 September 2001.

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<sup>128</sup> See Mark Thompson, *Forging War. The Media in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina* (Article 19/University of Luton, 1999), pp.21-109.

<sup>129</sup> 'Gradjani se, uglavnom, osecaju prilicno bezbedno ali ne kriju da se plase teroristickih provokacija, posebno na jugu Srbije i u – prestonici', *Politika*, 1 October 2001.

<sup>130</sup> See ICG Balkans Report No 116, *Peace in Presevo: Quick Fix or Long-Term Solution?*, 10 August 2001.



to be in the hands of the police and army.<sup>131</sup> As promises go unfulfilled, ethnic Albanian discontent may once again increase.

#### **D. THE SANDZAK**

The Sandzak is a Muslim Slav majority area that straddles the border between Montenegro and Serbia, running from Bosnia in the north to Kosovo in the south. The 1991 census indicated that approximately 54 per cent of Sandzak's approximately 420,000 residents were Muslims. They live intermixed with Serbs, Montenegrins and ethnic Albanians.

However, as many as 80,000 may have fled the region since 1991. From the beginning of the war in Bosnia in March 1992 until late 1993, the Milosevic regime practised an official state policy of persecution against the region's Muslims. Serbian police and paramilitary forces engaged in low-level ethnic cleansing of the Sandzak Muslim villages bordering Bosnia. This included killings, home burnings, and forced expulsions. The Yugoslav Army (VJ) surrounded the region's main city, Novi Pazar, with artillery, tanks and infantry positions. Paramilitary groups and the police (MUP) roamed the Sandzak and committed excesses, including murder, kidnappings, beatings, theft, extortion, and other acts designed to intimidate the local population.

The repression against Muslims eased after 1993, but continued in milder forms until DOS overthrew Milosevic on 5 October 2000. Like the ethnic Albanians were in varying degrees in southern Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia, the Sandzak Muslims were to a large extent disenfranchised from public life during the Milosevic era. Many were fired from their jobs in state-owned (socially-owned) companies, schools, hospitals, police, the judiciary and public administration. Forced out of the state economy, the Muslims have created a relatively thriving local economy based substantially on textiles.

As in parts of Bosnia and Kosovo, organisations promoting Wahhabi Islam have established a presence in Sandzak. There have been no incidents

over the last ten years in the Sandzak that could be characterised as Islamist violence. Serbian propaganda claims that the Sandzak is a breeding ground of terrorism must therefore be dismissed as false.

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

The alacrity with which Belgrade leaders – including Kostunica, Covic and Mihajlovic – joined the anti-Muslim harangue following 11 September should serve as a reminder that the post-Milosevic progress in Serbian politics rests on fragile foundations.

The Serbian media war on 'terrorism' is likely to have a negative effect on Kosovo. The nationalist rhetoric will likely strengthen the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) both in Belgrade and northern Kosovo, as well as increase efforts to expand parallel structures in Serb-majority regions of Kosovo.

The activities of the UPNKSK – working together with the Yugoslav Coordination Centre for Kosovo and Metohija, run by Nebojsa Covic – have already prevented the release of the 180 ethnic Albanian political prisoners held in Serbian jails since the Kosovo war, all of whom have now been effectively redefined as 'terrorists'. This further delays the start of a Serb-Albanian dialogue about Kosovo's future.

**Belgrade/Podgorica/Pristina/Sarajevo/  
Skopje/Tirana/Brussels, 9 November 2001**

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<sup>131</sup> 'Iseljavanje iz ekonomskih razloga', *Danas*, 19 September 2001.

## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA



## APPENDIX B

### ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

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The International Crisis Group (ICG) is a private, multinational organisation committed to strengthening the capacity of the international community to anticipate, understand and act to prevent and contain conflict.

ICG's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts, based on the ground in countries at risk of conflict, gather information from a wide range of sources, assess local conditions and produce regular analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers.

ICG's reports are distributed widely to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made generally available at the same time via the organisation's Internet site, [www.crisisweb.org](http://www.crisisweb.org). ICG works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analysis and to generate support for its policy prescriptions. The ICG Board - which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media - is directly involved in helping to bring ICG reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. ICG is chaired by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari; former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans has been President and Chief Executive since January 2000.

ICG's international headquarters are at Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC, New York and Paris. The organisation currently operates field projects in nineteen crisis-affected countries and regions across four continents:

Algeria, Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Zimbabwe in Africa; Burma/Myanmar, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Asia; Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia in Europe; and Colombia in Latin America.

ICG also undertakes and publishes original research on general issues related to conflict prevention and management. After the attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001, ICG launched a major new project on global terrorism, designed both to bring together ICG's work in existing program areas and establish a new geographical focus on the Middle East (with a regional field office planned for Amman) and Pakistan/Afghanistan (with a field office planned for Islamabad).

ICG raises funds from governments, charitable foundations, companies and individual donors. The following governments currently provide funding: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Foundation and private sector donors include the Ansary Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Open Society Institute, the Ploughshares Fund and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.

October 2001

Further information about ICG can be obtained from our website: [www.crisisweb.org](http://www.crisisweb.org)

## APPENDIX C

### ICG REPORTS AND BRIEFING PAPERS\*

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#### AFRICA

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##### ALGERIA

*The Algerian Crisis: Not Over Yet*, Africa Report N°24, 20 October 2000

*La crise algérienne n'est pas finie*, rapport Afrique N°24, 20 October 2000

*The Civil Concord: A Peace Initiative Wasted*, Africa Report N°31, 9 July 2001

*La concorde civile: Une initiative de paix manquée*, rapport Afrique N°31, 9 juillet 2001

*Algeria's Economy: The Vicious Circle of Oil and Violence*, Africa Report N°36, 26 October 2001

##### BURUNDI

*The Mandela Effect: Evaluation and Perspectives of the Peace Process in Burundi*, Africa Report N°20, 18 April 2000

*L'Effet Mandela: évaluation et perspectives du processus de paix Burundais*, rapport Afrique N°20, 18 avril 2000

*Burundi: The Issues at Stake. Political Parties, Freedom of the Press and Political Prisoners*, Africa Report N°23, 12 July 2000

*Burundi: les enjeux du débat. Partis politiques, liberté de la presse et prisonniers politiques*, rapport Afrique N°23, 12 juillet 2000

*Burundi Peace Process: Tough Challenges Ahead*, Africa Briefing, 27 August 2000

*Burundi: Neither War, nor Peace*, Africa Report N°25, 1 December 2000

*Burundi: Ni guerre, ni paix*, rapport Afrique N°25, 1 décembre 2000

*Burundi: Breaking the Deadlock, The Urgent Need for a New Negotiating Framework*, Africa Report N°29, 14 May 2001

*Burundi: Sortir de l'impasse. L'urgence d'un nouveau cadre de négociations*, rapport Afrique N°29, 14 mai 2001

*Burundi: 100 Days to put the Peace Process back on Track*, Africa Report N°33, 14 August 2001

*Burundi: Cent jours pour retrouver le chemin de la paix*, rapport Afrique N°33, 14 août 2001

##### DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

*Scramble for the Congo: Anatomy of an Ugly War*, Africa Report N°26, 20 December 2000

*Le partage du Congo: anatomie d'une sale guerre*, rapport Afrique N°26, 20 décembre 2000

*From Kabila to Kabila: Prospects for Peace in the Congo*, Africa Report N°27, 16 March 2001

*Disarmament in the Congo: Investing in Conflict Prevention*, Africa Briefing, 12 June 2001

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*Uganda and Rwanda: Friends or Enemies?* Africa Report N°15, 4 May 2000

*International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda: Justice Delayed*, Africa report N°30, 7 June 2001

*Tribunal pénal international pour le Rwanda: l'urgence de juger*, rapport Afrique N°30, 7 juin 2001

*"Consensual Democracy" in Post Genocide Rwanda: Evaluating the March 2001 District Elections*, Africa Report N°34, 9 October 2001

##### SIERRA LEONE

*Sierra Leone: Time for a New Military and Political Strategy*, Africa Report N°28, 11 April 2001

*Sierra Leone: Managing Uncertainty*, Africa Report N° 35, 24 October 2001

##### ZIMBABWE

*Zimbabwe: At the Crossroads*, Africa Report N°22, 10 July 2000

*Zimbabwe: Three Months after the Elections*, Africa Briefing, 25 September 2000

*Zimbabwe in Crisis: Finding a way Forward*, Africa Report N°32, 13 July 2001

*Zimbabwe: Time for International Action*, Africa Briefing, 12 October 2001

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\* Released since January 1999

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### BURMA/MYANMAR

*Burma/Myanmar: How Strong is the Military Regime?*, Asia Report N°11, 21 December 2000

### INDONESIA

*Indonesia's Crisis: Chronic but not Acute*, Asia Report N°6, 31 May 2000

*Indonesia's Maluku Crisis: The Issues*, Asia Briefing, 19 July 2000

*Indonesia: Keeping the Military Under Control*, Asia Report N°9, 5 September 2000

*Aceh: Escalating Tension*, Asia Briefing, 7 December 2000

*Indonesia: Overcoming Murder and Chaos in Maluku*, Asia Report N°10, 19 December 2000

*Indonesia: Impunity Versus Accountability for Gross Human Rights Violations*, Asia Report N°12, 2 February 2001

*Indonesia: National Police Reform*, Asia Report N°13, 20 February 2001

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*Bad Debt: The Politics of Financial Reform in Indonesia*, Asia Report N°15, 13 March 2001

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*Aceh: Can Autonomy Stem the Conflict?* ICG Asia Report N°18, 27 June 2001

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*Indonesia: Ending Repression in Irian Jaya*, Asia Report N°23, 20 September 2001

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*Indonesia: Next Steps in Military Reform*, Asia Report N°24, 11 October 2001

### CAMBODIA

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### CENTRAL ASIA

*Central Asia: Crisis Conditions in Three States*, Asia Report N°7, 7 August 2000

*ЦЕНТРАЛЬНАЯ АЗИЯ: УСЛОВИЯ КРИЗИСА В ТРЕХ ГОСУДАРСТВАХ*, Отчет МГПК по Азии № 7, 7 августа 2000 г

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*Islamist Mobilisation and Regional Security*, Asia Report N°14, 1 March 2001

*Incubators of Conflict: Central Asia's Localised Poverty and Social Unrest*, Asia Report N°16, 8 June 2001

*Central Asia: Fault Lines in the New Security Map*, Asia Report N°20, 4 July 2001

*Central Asia: Uzbekistan at Ten – Repression and Instability*, Asia Report N°21, 21 August 2001

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