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The Arab Bosnians?: The Middle East and the Security of the Balkans

A political cartoon that appeared in a Yugoslav newspaper summarizes the theme of this paper. The cartoon depicts Slobodan Milosevic phoning Saddam Hussein. Slobodan asks Saddam, “Whose turn is it this month to irritate the Americans, mine or yours?” Saddam replies, “It’s my turn, but I am busy attacking some Kurds. Can you take care of bothering the Americans for me?” Slobodan replies, “Sure Saddam, but you owe some Scuds for this one!”

The outbreak of the Bosnian civil war forged a link between the Balkans the Middle East and Islamic World that had not existed since the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. It provided the pretext for Middle East powers to intervene or some may argue interfere in the power dynamics of the Balkans. The instability of the Arab and Islamic world accompanied the arrival of the Middle Eastern players into the Balkan arena. The causes of the instability that has characterized the Middle Eastern political system, proliferation of weapons, the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and sectarian rivalries have now emerged as critical security issues in the Balkans.

Three actors have had a direct impact on Balkan security since the outbreak of the Bosnian civil war. The first is the *mujahadin*, (which means “strugglers”, in this case one who struggles for the cause of *Jihad*) and two nation-states, Iran and Iraq. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia have also played a prominent role in the Balkans. While the Bosnian civil war may have ended, the aforementioned parties established an infrastructure and foothold in the Balkans and have the capacity to reassert themselves, thus constituting a vital security concern in the future.

THE MUJAHADIN FACTOR

Bosnia

Since the outbreak of the civil war in Bosnia, foreign Islamic fighters, known as the *mujahadin* began to assist the Bosnian Army and paramilitary forces, either serving as instructors or fighters. Most *mujahadin* are free-lance soldiers under no specific national command. Many of the *mujahadin* who took part in the Balkan fighting belonged to a collective group known as the “Afghan Arabs”. This group refers to approximately 25,000 Arabs who fought in Afghanistan as part of a religious crusade against the Soviet Union.¹ Other sources estimate that only 2,500 Arabs took part in the Afghan conflict.² Whatever the numbers may be, after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, members of this group found themselves unwanted by their country of origin for fear that they would spread Islamist tendencies. Others were still imbued with a religious zeal, believing that if the atheist Soviet Empire could be defeated, so to any other rivals will eventually succumb to the might of their forces. So the Arab Afghans dispersed to take part in other conflicts in the Muslim world, including Bosnia, as well as Kashmir, Sudan, Chechnya, and Tajikistan. The Arab fighters came from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Libya, Sudan and Yemen.³ In addition to fighters from Iran, volunteers who fought in Bosnia also came from non-Arab nations such as Pakistan, Iran and Turkey.

The number of non-Bosnian Muslims in the Bosnian military was estimated at 500 to a 1000 fighters, from a dozen countries in the Middle East.⁴ Some 200-300 “Arab

¹ Anthony Shadid , “Afghan Arabs” AP, Dec. 2, 1996.

² “The Afghan Connection”, *Time*, Oct. 4, 1993.

³ Muhammad Sadiq, “Qisa al-afghan Al-Su’udiyiin” *al-Majalla*, May 11, 1996. p19.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 179.

Afghans” were based in Zenica, where they were widely feared according to *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, by Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims alike.⁵ 300 of these Afghan Arabs were organized into a unit known as “the Guerillas”, and operated with the Bosnian 3rd Corps in Zenica. Other Mujahadin operated in small cohesive groups, each unit being based on ties they forged in their countries of origin, or according to the units they fought with in Afghanistan. Some of the notable Mujahadin who took part in the jihad was a leader of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front, Kamar Kharban, a former fighter in the Afghan War, who visited Bosnia several times.⁶ Another commander of the Mujahadin in Bosnia was a Saudi, Abu Abd al-Aziz, also a veteran of the Afghanistan war. He visited Kuwait in early January 1993 to gather funds and weapons for the Bosnians, calling on the same Kuwait network that provided funds for the Afghan war.⁷ Other press reports claimed that the Bosnian Army received the highly lethal Stinger anti-aircraft missiles from the Afghan Arabs, but this was never confirmed.⁸

Support not only came from sympathetic coreligionists in the Gulf states, but from Muslims in the U.S., as well. The *al-Kifah* (struggle) Center in New York used to recruit volunteers to fight in Bosnia, in addition to organizing fundraisers. The Center was established in the mid-80s by Shaikh Omer Abdul-Rahman, the notorious blind preacher who now is imprisoned, on charges of partaking in the World Trade Center bombing.⁹

⁵ James Bruce, “Arab Veterans of the Afghan War”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, vol. 7 No 4.

⁶ Ibid, p. 179.

⁷ Berger, Carol, “Bosnian Muslims Turn to Kuwait for Money, Arms.” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 28, 1993. p.6.

⁸ Engelberg, Stephen, “Degrees Varies as Arabs Assist Bosnia’s Muslims.” *New York Times*, Aug. 23, 1992.

⁹ Ibid. p. 179.

Some of the Arabs who took part in the conflict were not necessarily Afghan veterans, with the case of Imad Bushnaq illustrating this point. The Bushnaqs were a Bosnian Muslim family who migrated from their hometown in Tuzla, along with other Muslim families, after Bosnia fell to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Many of these families settled in various parts of the Ottoman Empire, including the Bushnaqs (Bushnaq being the Arabic word for Bosnia), who settled in the town of Tul Karam, which is now part of the Occupied Territories in the West Bank. Ironically, the Bushnaqs had to flee once again, after the creation of Israel, and returned to Tuzla in 1948, where they were given Yugoslavian nationality. When the war broke out, Imad, a 27 year-old medical student decided to fight in the Bosnian army and was killed in 1992.

Khalil was a 22 year-old Palestinian born and raised in the UK, who had never been to his native Palestine. During the outbreak of the civil war in Bosnia, he felt a great sympathy for the suffering of his fellow co-religionists. Islamic Centers in the U.K. alongside raising funds for the Bosnians were recruiting volunteers to fight in the civil war. Khalil decided to volunteer as a fighter. He died a year later.

In rare incidences, some of the Mujahadin fighters were neither ethnically Arab nor Bosnian. The case in point is Kevin Holt, who is an American convert to Islam and took the name Isa Abdullah Ali. A member of the Mujahadin, he took part in the Bosnia conflict. US troops in Bosnia have received orders to arrest him and bring him in for questioning for past involvement in Islamic-inspired incidents against the US.¹⁰

Friction often emerged between the “Afghan Arabs” and the Bosnian Muslims, because of the former’s zealotry. This zealotry manifested itself with attacks on civilians.

¹⁰ Dana Priest, “Suspected D.C. Terrorist Sought by U.S. in Bosnia.” *Washington Post*, Jan. 25, 1996.

The “Afghan Arabs” were believed to have been responsible for the death of the Paul Goodall, a British aid worker in early 1994. Three Arab Muslim volunteers, carrying fake Pakistani passports were later shot dead at a Sarajevo roadblock, while three others were arrested in the connection to the murder. The attack on this aid worker was reminiscent of another attack in Afghanistan, where the “Afghan Arabs” ambushed and killed four U.N. officials. Such attacks usually disillusioned the Bosnians and even Afghans from the Afghan Arabs.¹¹

Article III of the Annex on Military Aspects of the Dayton Accords, stipulates, “In particular, all foreign Forces, including individual advisors, freedom fighters, trainers, volunteers, and personnel from neighboring and other States, shall be withdrawn from the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina in accordance with Article III, paragraph 1.”

After the signing of the Accords, the Clinton Administration feared that the presence of Islamic militants in Bosnia could have posed a possible threat to the U.N. Forces. On Jan. 24, 1996, U.S. forces in Bosnia heightened security measures after intelligence sources determined that Islamic militants were planning to attack U.S. targets there. The motives behind such an attack were believed to be three fold. First, they feared that Islamists might retaliate against the U.S. for its perceived lack of support for Bosnia during the civil war. Second, the mujahadin may attempt an attack to eliminate the presence of U.S. forces in the Balkans. Finally, Bosnia was feared to be a potential base for acts of retribution against U.S policy in the Middle East. Many of the Mujahadin groups operated around Tuzla, which was the main base for the U.S. forces arriving in Bosnia. The Bosnian government pledged to expel the mujahadin after the implementation of the peace agreement, but its willingness or ability to do so was

¹¹ Anthony Davis, “Foreign Combatants in Afghanistan”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, July 1993. p.330.

questionable. This was illustrated by media reports stating that some Mujahadin acquired Bosnian passports so that they would not have to leave.

Kosovo

The participation of Mujahadin fighters in Kosovo has been harder to determine than in Bosnia. The Serbs accused the Kosovo Liberation Army of receiving arms and support from the Muslim countries. According to a U.S Department of Defense analyst, Patrick Clawson says, "Some Islamists report they have been active, although intriguingly some complain about lack of cooperation from the KLA."¹² He then argues that reports of a significant mujahadin presence in Kosovo should be treated with skepticism. "It is hard to imagine that aid to Kosovo which would go through Albania would remain undetected, given the large presence of the international news media and of Western intelligence agencies."¹³ Not only that, but it seemed that the Kosovars learned a lesson from Bosnia, since Muslim militants joining the battle, would erode support from the West.

IRAN

Bosnia

The Iranian presence in Sarajevo can hardly go unnoticed. The Iranian Embassy has a prominent location on the Malatca River, among Sarajevo's Austro-Hungarian monuments. The Iranian Cultural Center occupies a central position in the popular Ferhadija Street in the center of Sarajevo, in between cafes and music stores.

¹² Cigar, Norman and Patrick Clawson, "The Arab World, Iran and the Kosovo Crisis." *Special Policy Forum Report, Policywatch 391*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 25, 1999.

¹³ Ibid.

The connection between Bosnia and Iran predates to the Balkan civil war. According to *Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, the Bosnian president Alija Izetbegovic “has long been an Iranian protégé and member of the Fundamentalist ‘Fida’iyane Islam’ organization committed to the conversion of all Bosnia and Herzegovina into an Islamic republic despite the fact that Moslems number only about one-third of the population.”¹⁴ The Bosnian Foreign Minister, Haris Silajdzic carried out eight state visits to Iran prior to the hostilities, while Izetbegovic had visited Iran twice.

Iran has traditionally seen itself as the guardian of oppressed Muslims worldwide, and was a staunch supporter of the Bosnian Muslims. Iran was instrumental in compelling the Organization of the Islamic Conference in December of 1992, to call for a lifting of the arms embargo.¹⁵ Iran’s official involvement in the civil war began when Ayatollah Jennati, former head of the Islamic Propagation Organization, visited Bosnia in August 1992, as a representative of the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of Iran’s Shi’a Muslims. At this time, Jennati was the primary force behind The Bosnia-Herzegovina Support Headquarters. This Committee shipped food, medicine, and other supplies to the Bosnian Muslims, as well as donating \$20 million in April 1993.¹⁶ Along with this organization, another private group known as the Foundation for the Oppressed and Disabled headed by Mohsen RafiqDust, the former head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, began to channel aid to Bosnia. After Jennati’s visit, on October 8, 1992, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards declared its readiness to fight in Bosnia. US officials believed that the Revolutionary Guards eventually served in Bosnia as advisors, rather than taking part

¹⁴ cited in Sherman, Arnold *Perfidy in the Balkans-The Rape of Yugoslavia*, (Athens: Psychogios Publications, 1993)

¹⁵ The OIC comprises 52 members, all of which are Muslim nations.

in the fighting on a large scale.¹⁷ In November 1992, it was reported that 50 fighters from the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hizbullah (party of God) had left for Bosnia to arm and train the Bosnian Muslim fighters.¹⁸

However, Iran's direct participation in Bosnia might have had a detrimental effect at the same time. Because Iran was determined to act unilaterally towards Bosnia, outside of the UN framework, the former Secretary of State Warren Christopher expressed concern that lifting the arms embargo may lead to increased Iranian influence in Bosnia.¹⁹ These fears began to materialize in September 1992, when Croatian authorities intercepted an Iranian shipment of 4,000 rifles and 1 million rounds of ammunition headed for Bosnia.²⁰ It was reported that 40 Iranian Revolutionary Guards were on board the intercepted aircraft.²¹

In mid-1993, Iran offered 10,000 troops to take part in a U.N.-O.I.C. contingent, but the U.N. refused, fearing more Iranian involvement in Bosnia's politics. In 1993, an editorial in the Iranian newspaper, *Resalat* reflected the Iranian's suspicion and frustration with the inaction of the U.N. In a political commentary, the author criticizes then U.N. Secretary General Butrous Ghali, during a meeting with the O.I.C. in New York. The O.I.C. met with him to submit a proposal to establish an Islamic peace keeping force in Bosnia. According to the editorial, Butrous-Ghali said that instead of going to Bosnia-Hercegovina, they should be sent to Somalia instead. The author then

¹⁶ Kenneth Katzmann, Julie Kim, and Carol Migdalovitz, "Bosnia-Hercegovina: Support From Islamic Countries", *CRS Report for Congress*, June 19, 1993.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Pro-Iranian Guerilla Groups Send Fighters to Bosnia", Reuters, Nov. 11, 1992.

¹⁹ Kenneth Katzmann, et. all , "Bosnia-Hercegovina: Support From Islamic Countries", *CRS Report for Congress*.

²⁰ Martin Sieff, "Croatia Seizes Arms on Iranian Plane on a Tip From U.S." *Washington Times*, Sept. 11, 1992.

criticizes the U.N. for encouraging nations to dispatch peacekeepers to the region, yet at the same time discouraging forces from Muslim nations to take part in the effort.²²

In May 1994, Iran appointed Mohammed Taherian as the Iranian ambassador to Bosnia. Taherian had served as the Iranian Ambassador to Afghanistan, where he was instrumental in funneling Iranian aid to Afghan Shi'a militias fighting against the Soviet occupation.²³ On May 4, 1994, Croatia and Bosnia made an agreement to renew military cooperation against the Serbs, and subsequently Croatia allowed Iran to conduct large-scale arms transfers to the Bosnian government, creating a weapons pipeline that existed until January 1996.²⁴ On May 13, 1994, an Iranian air force plane with 60 tons of explosives and fusing equipment had landed in Zagreb, where the shipment was then sent overland into Bosnia, while Croatia kept one-third of the weapons for itself.²⁵ By August 2, 1994, it was reported that Iran had made at least 30 shipments of weapons, using Russian cargo aircraft. The Bosnian government began to even request more weapons, such as night vision goggles, and rocket-propelled grenades from the Iranians.²⁶ The shipments of these small arms, anti-tank weapons and ammunition to the Bosnians, proved to be instrumental for the Bosnian employment of infantry tactics against the more heavily armed Serbs.²⁷ Croatia allowed the arms shipments only after the U.S. said discretely that it would not object to arms reaching the beleaguered Bosnian Army.²⁸ The

²¹ "Will Iran Let Balkan Muslims Achieve Peace?" *Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy*, Jan. 31, 1993.

²² "The Latest Utterances of the Secretary General and the Oppression of the Bosnian Muslims". *Resalat*, Aug. 14, 1993.

²³ "Taherian Appointed Ambassador to Bosnia". Tehran Islamic Republic News Agency. May 3, 1994.

²⁴ "U.S.-Iran-Bosnia Arms Shipments", Reuters, April 5, 1996

²⁵ Kenneth Katzmann, Julie Kim and Richard Best, "Bosnia and Iranian Arm Shipments: Issues of U.S. Policy and Involvement." *CRS Report for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, April 24, 1996.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Peter Waldman, "Muslim Nations' Support for Bosnia Rises," *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 11, 1995.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

U.S. Congress denounced the tacit approval of allowing Iranian arm shipments into Bosnia since it allowed Iran to establish a foothold in Europe.²⁹

By January 1995, Iran reiterated its readiness to dispatch Iranian troops to Bosnia. An article in the Iranian newsmagazine, *Echo of Islam*, a publication which is closely aligned with the government, stated that, “According to news reports on the extent of the Serb aggressive expansion to Muslim areas, U.N. forces in Bosnia are going to leave this war-stricken republic. The Islamic Republic of Iran since it is part of the U.N., recently expressed its readiness to send forces to Bosnia.”³⁰

In November 1995, Iran convened a meeting of the OIC in Teheran, where Bosnian officials were present, to formulate a united Islamic position vis-à-vis the Dayton Peace Accords, as well as coordinating military and economic assistance to Bosnia.³¹ Iran later denounced the Accords as being unjust to the Bosnian Muslims, probably objecting to the Accords because it called for their withdrawal from Bosnia. However, it was reported that 200 Revolutionary Guards remained in Bosnia in defiance of the deadline, many of whom were posing as civilian relief workers.³² The U.S. also feared an attack from Iranians stationed in Bosnia, after the Clinton Administration imposed tighter sanctions against Iran in May 1995. Many U.S. officials believed that the Bosnian government was unwilling or unable to expel the Iranians. It was believed that the Bosnian government felt a debt to Iran for helping them from the outset of the civil war, and also Bosnia wanted to continue to receive Iranian arms. The U.S. threatened to

²⁹ Kenneth Katzmann, Julie Kim and Richard Best, “Bosnia and Iranian Arm Shipments: Issues of U.S. Policy and Involvement.”

³⁰ “Western Anxiety over the Presence of Islamic Forces in Bosnia”. *Echo of Islam*, Jan. 1995.

³¹ Katzmann, et. all, “Bosnia-Herzegovina: Support From Islamic Countries”, *CRS Report for Congress*.

³² Alfred Prados, Julie Kim and Kenneth Katzmann, “Bosnia-Herzegovina: Foreign Islamic Fighters (“Mujahadeen”). *CRS Report for Congress*, Jan. 29, 1996.

halt military and financial aid to Bosnia if all the Iranian military personnel were not expelled.³³

An incident occurred in Feb 1996, when Croat police in Bosnia arrested nine Iranians. Iran insisted that they were Koran reciters, invited by a Bosnian Muslim Organization. However, the Croatian state news agency said that while the men were not armed, they had “technical equipment generally used for intelligence purposes.” In that same month, NATO forces raided what they called a “terrorist training camp” in Bosnia and three Iranians were forced to return to Teheran.³⁴ Despite the crackdown on this camp, the Iranians were still able to use the embassies in Sarajevo and Zagreb for logistical support. Iran also sent intelligence officers to assist in the development of the Bosnian intelligence agency.³⁵ In March 1996, it was reported that the Bosnian Government had sent a delegation of soldiers for training in Iran.³⁶

In November 1996 NATO began to fear that the Bosnian government was trying to stockpile more weapons than was allowed under the Dayton Agreement, disrupting the balance of power in the region. It feared that the Bosnian government might have signed secret arms agreements with Iran and Turkey. The U.S. fear was stated by a NATO intelligence officer who said, “The Americans are desperate now as they watch their leverage with the Bosnians slip away. The foreign power center in Sarajevo is shifting away from Europe and the United States to the Islamic nations, especially Iran, Turkey and Malaysia, who are determined to arm and equip the Muslim state.”³⁷

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Reuters, Feb. 22, 1996.

³⁵ Bill Gertz. “Iranian Military, Intelligence Remain at Work in Bosnia”, *The Washington Times*, April 19, 1996.

³⁶ Kenneth Katzmman, Julie Kim and Richard Best, “Bosnia and Iranian Arm Shipments: Issues of U.S. Policy and Involvement.” *CRS Report for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, April 24, 1996.

³⁷ Hedges, Chris, “Bosnia Reported to Be Smuggling Heavy Artillery.” *New York Times*.” Nov. 8, 1996.

Kosovo

There was little Iranian infrastructure to coordinate arm shipments to Kosovo. In the Bosnian civil war, the Iranian embassies in Croatia and Sarajevo served as crucial logistical centers for supporting the Muslims. However, an Iranian ambassador was not dispatched to Tirana until February 1999. Iran's position vis-à-vis Kosovo marked a dramatic shift from its policy to Bosnia. In the summer of 1998 Serbian offensive in Kosovo, the Iranian press called for cooperation with the West on numerous occasions. In a June 16th, 1998 editorial in the *Teheran Times*, which is closely linked with the Iranian government, called for immediate action by NATO and the OIC against Milosevic and other editorials even castigated NATO for not launching air strikes sooner to protect the Muslim Kosovars.

However the debate over Kosovo reflected the fragmentation within the Iranian power structure and media. The hard line Supreme Islamic leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei said that NATO air strikes were an attempt to annihilate the Muslims of Europe.”³⁸ Traditional suspicions of the West resurfaced, which was illustrated by an editorial in the *Iran Daily*, on April 3 saying, “It is difficult to swallow that the Christians are fighting amongst each other to save the Muslims of Kosovo.” The hard line Ayatollah Jennati, who was one of the first Iranian officials to visit Bosnia after the outbreak of the civil war, served as Khamenei's representative to the relief headquarters of the Kosovar Muslims. On May 8th, 1998 he claimed that, “The US double standard policy toward the

³⁸ Cigar, Norman and Patrick Clawson, “The Arab World, Iran and the Kosovo Crisis.” *Special Policy Forum Report, Policywatch 391*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 25, 1999.

Balkan Crisis on the one hand and Washington's support for independence of Kosovo on the other provoked the Serbs to attack Muslim Kosovars."³⁹

THE IRAQ FACTOR

Bosnia

The connection between Yugoslavia and Iraq began in during the Iran-Iraq war, when the former Yugoslavia sold anything from artillery systems to chemical warfare suits to Iraq. In 1988, the multiple rocket launchers, the Orkan M-87 appeared in Iraq, a joint Iraqi-Yugoslav venture, which was used by Serbian forces to attack Sarajevo. A single unit was able to fire 300 bomblets, along with 420 steel spheres, which proved lethal during the siege of Sarajevo. According to western intelligence sources, in addition to rockets, Iraqi MiG-23 fighters were reportedly seen in Belgrade⁴⁰.

Kosovo

Iraq shared a common bond with Yugoslavia during the Kosovo crisis, owing to a sense of resistance to a common adversary. Both Yugoslavia and Iraq's interest lay in eroding the presence of U.S. forces abroad, whether in the Balkans or the Middle East. In April of 2000, according to the Iraqi News Agency, Iraq's Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan said his country is "keen to expand full cooperation with Yugoslavia which stood firm in the face of the American aggression."⁴¹ These comments were made during the visit to Iraq of Maja Gojkovic, the Yugoslav Deputy Prime Minister. The alliance was worrisome based on the notion that Yugoslavia has fissile material and Iraq, missile technology. Under Tito, Yugoslavia developed its nuclear research programme and

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ John Sweeney, "Saddam Supplies Serb War Machine", *The Observer*, May 31, 1992.

⁴¹ Editorial, "Saddam's Rogue Alliance", *Washington Times*, April 3, 2000.

experts estimate that there is 50 kilos of weapons-grade uranium stored near Belgrade; an amount is enough to assemble several crude atomic bombs.⁴²

In July 2000, Ramadan stated that Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic are planning “strategic cooperation” that “rejects hostile U.S. policy.”⁴³ These comments were made as 60 officials and businessmen led by Yugoslav Minister of Trade Borislav Vukovic were visiting Iraq. In that same month, Iraq and Yugoslavia signed a trade agreement but Vukovic commented that the accord did “create the conditions for further promoting economic cooperation through building construction projects, technology transfers and joint production in Iraq.”⁴⁴ However “informed Western sources”, according to the Arabic newspaper, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, believe that Yugoslavia and Iraq in fact signed a secret military accord, stipulating technological cooperation in the military and information sphere. Some reports have indicated that Yugoslav military advisors are in Iraq, aiding in the production of the “al-Sumud missile.”⁴⁵ This state visit was followed up by a visit by Iraqi Interior Minister, Muhammad Zimam Abd al-Razaq with his Serbian counterpart Vljako Stojiljkovic, in Belgrade in September 2000. During the meeting, the two discussed ways “to bolster the joint struggle against the imperialist U.S. enemy.”⁴⁶

⁴² Con Coughlin, “Saddam Kills Mother for Sins of Her Sons,” *Sunday Telegraph*, March 26, 2000.

⁴³ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “Saddam, Milosevic Seek ‘Strategic Cooperation’”, *Iraq Report*, vol.3, no.26, Aug. 4, 2000.

⁴⁴ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “Is There a Secret Iraqi-Yugoslav Military Agreement?”, *Iraq Report*, vol.3, no.26, Aug. 4, 2000.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, “Iraq, Serbia Discuss Opposition to the United States.” *Iraq Report*, vol.3, no.32, Sep. 29, 2000.

CONCLUSION

The Balkans have been contested by external powers since time immemorial and the entrance of the Middle Eastern actors into the fray has only exacerbated tensions in the region. As for the future, the majority of Mujahadin in Bosnia have left for new conflicts in other trouble spots such as Kashmir and Chechnya. . As for the future of Iraq-Serbian relations, the direction of this alliance is still uncertain with the change of power in Belgrade.

There is always the possibility of other Middle Eastern nations intervening Balkan affairs. Turkey has sent contingents to take part in the U.N. peacekeeping forces. One however should not ignore Turkey's position on the Bosnia issue. It was the late president Ozal who said, "that the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina are to Turkey what the Palestinians are to the Arabs."⁴⁷ At the Istanbul meeting in 1992 of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Turkey called for direct military intervention against Serbia and lifting the arms embargo on Bosnia. Turkey has also signed a military agreement with Albania and supported the Kosovo separatists. Thus Turkey was able to put pressure on Albania's Balkan neighbor to its south, Greece. These agreements, combined with support for Macedonia, reveal the intricacies of outside intervention in the Balkans.

Iran and Saudi Arabia on the other hand have established a permanent presence in Bosnia, and whatever rivalries exist between them in the Middle East will also manifest in the Balkans. Saudi Arabia, which believes itself to be the sole guardian of Islam may feel threatened by the Iranian Shi'a presence in Sarajevo and may try to curtail the latter's

⁴⁷ Sherman, Arnold, *Perfidy in the Balkans-the Rape of Yugoslavia* (Athens: Psychogios Publications, 1993) p.212.

influence. As I was visiting the Iranian Cultural Center, a Bosnian who was sitting there warned me of the tensions between Iran and the pro-Saudi Wahhabis (a puritanical Sunni movement) in Sarajevo.

Other outside powers that took an active role in the Bosnia conflict were Malaysia, the first country to sever ties with Yugoslavia and Sudan which took a militant posture, declaring the Bosnian Muslim struggle a jihad against the infidels.

Unfortunately, the Yugoslav situation replicated the conditions of the Lebanese civil war where it was the interference of outside powers that prolonged the conflict. During the 19th Century, the Balkans were linked with the Ottomans and the Eastern Question and thus considered a part of the Near East. In the 21st Century the Balkans will most likely be look for incorporation in the EU, or at least struggle to find its role within the greater scheme of Middle East politics. The Balkans have broken the Near Eastern “yoke” that had dominated it for 500 years, yet the Near East will certainly try to reassert itself in this region once again.