

UGOTAVLJANJE IDEOLOŠKE RAZLIČNOSTI IN RADIKALNEGA POTENCIALA BOSANSKIH ISLAMISTOV PREK NJIHOVIH INTERNETNIH DEJAVNOSTI V ZVEZI Z DAWO

IDENTIFYING THE IDEOLOGICAL VARIETY AND RADICAL POTENTIAL OF BOSNIAN ISLAMISTS THROUGH THEIR CYBER DAWA ACTIVITIES

Professional article

Povzetek Spopadanje s procesi radikalizacije je dolgoročno eden od učinkovitih načinov bojevanja proti terorizmu. Dawa (pridiganje in vabljenje k islamu) predstavlja pomembno stopnjo v radikalizacijskem procesu islamističnih skrajnih skupin in njegova pravilna identifikacija nam lahko pomaga pri določanju njegove radikalizacijske moči. Islamistične skrajne skupine so sprevidele moč interneta pri širjenju dawe in ga temu primerno izkoriščajo. Pri tem bosanski islamisti niso nikakršna izjema. Ker živijo v različnih državah, internet zanje postaja še pomembnejše in primernejše orodje, da ohranijo stik s svojimi simpatizerji iz domovine ali bosanskih imigrantskih skupnosti. Njihove internetne dejavnosti, ki vključujejo spletne strani, klepetalnice in forume, nam ponujajo številne podatke za analizo in nam omogočajo, da identificiramo in razvrstimo islamistične skupine ter natančno določimo njihovo ideološko usmeritev. Analiza vsebin spletnih skupin posameznih skupin razkriva pri bosanskih islamistih različne ideološke smeri znotraj dawe. Začetne več ali manj homogene razlike v islamu, ki so se pojavile v bosanskem muslimanskem okolju, poimenovane kot »vahabizem«, so se razdelile in pojavile so se različne ločine, od katerih je vsaka drugače prispevala k procesu radikalizacije. Nekatere so bližje tistemu, kar bi lahko poimenovali dolgoročni salafi/vahabi islam, ki se osredotoča na miroljubno (a še vedno zelo škodljivo) propagando, druge pa so zveste islamu, usmerjenemu v globalni džihad, z močno podporo gibanja mudžahedinov, nekatere pa pridigajo skrajno radikalno takfeer razlago islama. Vse pa za širitev svojega sporočila pogosto uporabljajo internet. Z raziskovanjem njihove »intranetne dawe« in razumevanjem razlik lahko ugotavljamo cilje, sredstva in celotne možnosti radikalnega potenciala takšnih skupin, kar nam pomaga tudi pri učinkovitejšem spopadanju z njihovimi negativnimi učinki.

Ključne besede *Skrajni islamizem, bosanski islamisti, dawa, internet.*

Abstract *Countering the radicalization process is, in a long term, one of the effective ways to combat terrorism. Dawa (preaching and inviting to Islam) represents an important stage in the radicalization process of Islamic radical groups, and its correct identification can help us to determine its radicalizing strength. Islamic radical groups have identified the dawa potential of the internet and are exploiting it accordingly. Bosnian Islamists are no exception to this. Residing in various countries, the internet becomes an even more important and convenient tool for them to keep in contact with their sympathizers from homeland or Bosnian immigrant communities. Their internet activities, which include web sites, chat rooms, and forums, provide rich data for analyses and allow us to identify and classify the Islamist groups and pinpoint their ideological orientation. Analyzing the content of the groups' web sites reveals different ideological trends within Bosnian Islamist dawa. The initial, rather homogeneous Islamic deviation that appeared in Bosnian Muslim milieu called 'wahabism' split and a variety of sects appeared, each one contributing differently to the process of radicalization. Some of them are closer to what we could call long term salafy/wahabi Islam, which focuses on peaceful (but still very damaging) propaganda, others adhere to global jihad oriented Islam with strong support for mujahedeen movements, and some preach extremely radical takfeer interpretation of Islam. All of them use the internet extensively to spread their message. By examining their 'cyber dawa' and understanding the differences, we can identify aims, means and an overall radical potential of such groups, which in turn helps us to better counter their negative effect.*

Key words *Radical Islam, Bosnian islamists, dawa, internet.*

Introduction AIVD's (Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service) report "From Dawa to Jihad" defines radical Islam as a multi-form phenomenon consisting of a variety of groups, whose aims and means vary differently on the scale of radicalism, ranging between jihad (meaning here the actual armed combat) and dawa (preaching and inviting to Islam) (AIVD, 2004). The dawa structures are not necessarily violent, nevertheless they still represent an important security risk by contributing extensively to the radicalization process, which at the end can turn into violence.

Islamist organizations have identified the enormous potential of the internet as a public relations and propaganda (in other words - dawa) tool and begun to exploit it accordingly. Monitoring the internet activities of the Islamists can provide us with useful information on groups' activities, their ideological orientation and helps us to identify the radical potential that lies within their dawa.¹

¹ For the purpose of this article, the following definition of radicalism by AIVD will apply: "The (active) pursuit of and/or support to far reaching changes in society which may constitute a danger to (the continued existence of) the democratic legal order (aim), which may involve the use of undemocratic methods (means) that may harm the functioning of the democratic legal order (effect). In line with this, radicalization can be interpreted as a person's (growing) willingness to pursue and/or support such changes himself (in an undemocratic way or otherwise), or his encouraging others to do so." (AIVD, 2004:13)

In this article we will try to identify and classify some of the main Bosnian Islamist groups using their dawa activities on the internet for analysis and data gathering.- By analyzing the content of their web sites, forums and chat rooms and comparing it against the background of actual events, we shall also try to determine the role of these groups in the radicalization process and show some of the practical examples of how their dawa manifests in and influences practical situations. Considering the strength of the radicalizing potential, the groups will be limited to the ones that profess Sunni Islam, more or less influenced by Islamic interpretations close to Saudi Arabia (wahabism). The internet activities of Bosnian Shiite groups are also noted, however their influence is due to a small number of Shiite adherents among Bosnians very limited when compared to their Sunni counterparts. Other Sunni groups that have a different ideological orientation from wahabism, such as Bosnian offshoot of Muslim Brotherhood, have a much smaller radicalizing potential when compared to wahabi groups and will not be discussed here. Considering this, the term “Bosnian Islamists” will generally refer to the groups examined below. It should be also noted that the term is by no means limited to the Bosnian Islamists residing in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as it refers to the ethnical dimension of Bosnian Muslims regardless of their residence or nationality. In fact, a considerable number of the most active Bosnian Islamists reside outside BiH and connect freely with other ideologically similar groups in various European countries. The ethnical proximity and common language, of course, facilitate the interaction with the homeland and other Bosnian diaspora groups, making them the main target audience, but their activities, as well as their goals are certainly not limited to the geographical borders of BiH. This rationale follows one of the main ideological premises of the Islamist (or global jihadi) movements - being part of the Umma (community/unity of Muslims). In Islamists’ thought, Umma transcends any national or other borders (or notions such as citizenship, ethnicity, financial status, etc.) and the only condition to be a part of it is to accept the Islamic faith. An Islamist agenda, therefore, has always a global dimension.

1 DIFFERENTIATING AMONG BOSNIAN ISLAMIST GROUPS – BASIC IDEOLOGICAL DIVISION

When writing about Bosnian Islamists, the media, as well as some of the researchers, tend to present them as a homogenous group, usually labeling it ‘wahabis’ or ‘salafis’, and disregard or not being aware of their ideological variations, which, on the other hand, the Islamists themselves are very careful to preserve. The label ‘wahabi’ is particularly misused. It was first applied to the Bosnian Muslim groups which rejected the religious authority of Islamic community (IZ- Islamska zajednica - the official Bosnian Muslim body in BiH) and its more liberal Hanafi school of Islam, practiced by the majority of Bosnians, and adhered instead to a very conservative interpretations of Islam, characterized by their outside ‘wahabi appearance’ with men wearing long beards and pants above the ankle, complete cover for women, strict behavioral rules, etc. The principles of Al-Wahhab and Hanbali school (the

most conservative of the four schools of Islam) certainly take an important place in their religious interpretations, making their Islam similar to a type of Islam practiced mostly in the Gulf states. However, their ideological interpretation does not strictly depend on the historical doctrine of Al-Wahhab, and has to be understood within specifics of the development of Islam among Bosnians during and after the war in the 90s, while also considering a variety of outside ideological influences. In addition, the groups do not use the same word when identifying themselves. Names such as Salafiyya, El-Muvehhdun or Ehlu-Ttewhid are sometimes used, while some of them do not use any name at all, simply saying that they are regular Muslims who want to practice 'true' Islam. Thus the label 'wahabi' can be misleading as it does not necessarily reflect a straightforward connection of these groups with the movement of Al-Wahhab, obscuring subtle but important differences in interpretations and it does not respect the ideological variety within the groups. Different ideological groups have different goals and means to achieve them and knowing the differences is important when determining their radical potential.

The analysis of Bosnian Islamists examined below focuses on the identification of the main ideological characteristics and differences between the groups as reflected in the content of their internet activities and examines the ideological influence of their internet *dawa* in the real environment. This was done by analyzing the content of texts, books, audio and video material published on the groups' web sites, identifying, following closely and comparing the opinions expressed by the members/sympathizers of the groups on the forums, comparing the response on different Islamist 'rival' web sites, gathering additional information through personal emails, examining lectures and debates in chat rooms, analyzing ideologically affiliated web sites of non-Bosnian Islamists and by using the background data in public media. Considering the methods, aims, ideological orientation and radical potential, four basic groups can be discerned among the Bosnian Islamists:

- salafy/wahabi *dawa* group
- global jihad group
- takfeer group²
- other sects³.

1.1 Salafy/wahabi *dawa* group

The salafy/wahabi group propagates typical Saudi influenced interpretations of Islam, which are based on conservative, strict and rigid doctrines of Muhammad ibn 'Abd Al-Wahhab and the Hanbali School. While Al-Wahhab's doctrine is being adopted also by global jihad and takfeer groups (among other because of the centra-

² The author chose the term 'takfeer' to denote the third group, because it is their specific view regarding the concept of 'takfeer' that sets them apart from the global jihad group. In addition, the group's religious opponents use the same term when referring to them.

³ Although the investigation of this group is beyond the scope of this article it is important to note that due to the sectarian nature of Islamist groups, new sects are constantly appearing, and despite their initially limited influence they could evolve into a radicalizing factor (i.e. the group of Sheikh Mahmud Abdul Aziz Jaudah).

lity of jihad and takfeer in his thought⁴), the difference is that the wahabi group is following mainstream Saudi Islam, respecting Saudi religious authorities, while the other two groups consider Saudi rulers and their religious clique to be the enemies of Islam. The difference between the groups is well illustrated by their response to the letter of Sheikh Salman El-Auda, a prominent religious authority in Saudi Arabia, to Osama bin Laden, written in September 2007. In his letter, Sheikh El-Auda, who himself was once the main instigator against the Saudi family⁵, but has recently, after being released from Saudi jail, retracted his radicalism, addresses Bin Laden to stop spilling the blood of innocent Muslims by encouraging them to join his jihadi network, and emphasizes instead a long term 'correct' dawa, which has much greater importance for the Islamic cause (El-Auda, 2007). While salafy/wahabi affiliated web sites published and praised the letter of the Sheikh, the web sites associated with global jihad and takfeer groups strongly condemned the letter and considered it a 'conspiracy of the enemies', which should be completely disregarded by 'sincere brothers in Islam'.⁶

The wahabi dawa is spread actively by a group of Bosnian dais (Islamic missionaries, preachers), educated at the Islamic universities abroad (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria...). After returning from abroad, they took an active role in spreading their version of Islam, which they consider to be more correct than the one Bosnian Muslims have been practicing so far. Their general view is that Bosnian way of practicing Islam is too much influenced by local and national traditions and contains too many innovations (Bid'ah) that have nothing to do with 'correct' Islam. They see themselves as the new educators, bringing to the Bosnian Muslim environment 'pure' Islam and correct ways of practicing it in order to become a 'true' Muslim.

One of the strongest centers of salafy/wahabi dawa is in Vienna, represented by-Mohammed Porca and his mejlis Tewhid. The head of the IZ (Islamic community), Rais ul-Ulama Mustafa Ceric, referred on several occasion to Porca as the main leader and financier behind the Bosnian wahabi movement and openly warned Austrian authorities about their wahabi influence.⁷ -Porca is connected to a number of influential Bosnian wahabi dais in BiH and abroad (Buturovic, 2007). One of his associates is Safet Kuduzovic, an active lecturer at the foundation Daru-l-Kuran (School of Quran) in Mostar.⁸ The school was founded by Dzevad Golos in February 2006, for the purposes of learning 'hifz' (memorizing the Quran). It was set up independently from the IZ and has a clear wahabi orientation. Both, Kuduzovic and Golos, strongly

⁴ *More on Al-Wahhab's doctrines: Schwartz, 2002; Gold, 2003-*.

⁵ *On El-Auda: Fandy, 1999; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Kostiner, 1996.*

⁶ <http://www.Islamskadrzava.org> (the web site changed to <http://www.putvjernika.com>).

⁷ *Ceric appealed to Austrian authorities to immediately stop the activities of Bosnian wahabi radicals in Vienna, who are preaching wahabi Islam to Bosnians and are also active in EU countries. In Ceric's words, these preachers try to show IZ as renegades of Islam, because they are not following their interpretations. He added that although IZ has wahabi radicals in Bosnia under control, the parallel wahabi institutions, which exist in Austria, are out of their reach. ("Između Beca i Sarajeva", <http://www.terorizam.net/GostiClanci.asp?GostiID=72>, 2.8.2007).*

⁸ <http://www.darulquran.org>.

criticized IZ's religious authority.⁹ In 2008, the school expanded and opened another branch in Sarajevo. In addition to the regular religious education program, the foundation organizes trips, humanitarian work, live lectures in chat rooms, Islamic gatherings, publishes books, video and audio material, etc. Many of the lecturers at the school publish their views and audio lectures on several other wahabi web sites, which are constantly growing in numbers.¹⁰

Porca is also the head of the shariatic board of newspaper Al-Asr (available also in electronic form), which reflects the views and activities of salafy/wahabi group.¹¹ Several Bosnian wahabi dais can be found among the writers. The newspaper is published by the djemat in Holland, called 'Stichting Hidzra' and is available in all the djemats of Bosnian diaspora as well as in BiH and Sandzak.

The wahabi group is extremely active in their dawa through publishing activities, numerous web sites, lectures, and Islamic gatherings. The reports of at least 6 'Islamic gatherings' that took place between years 2005-07 in Vienna, Netherlands and Germany were posted on one of the wahabi web sites.¹² The participants (mainly Bosnian Muslims, but also others) came from Germany, Slovenia, Austria, Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxemburg, Sandzak, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Croatia and France. Such gatherings (bos. 'Islamski susreti') are also regularly organized in BiH and neighboring countries and are very popular among young Muslims. They are an important dawa tool and serve to establish contacts on international level, recruiting and even to collect money for various purposes. The organization of these meetings continues to the present time.

Another Bosnian dai, whose views on Islam left an important impact on wahabi and other Islamist groups is Jusuf Barcic. Barcic was a close associate of Porca (also a colleague from his studies in Saudi Arabia) and a rather controversial figure in the Bosnian religious milieu. During the war, he was an employee of IIRO (International Islamic Relief Organization) – a Saudi charity, associated with terrorist activities (Buturovic, 2007).¹³ Barcic was famous for his radical views, such as disregard for traffic rules, which according to him were not in accordance with the rules of Islam (Alic, 2007). He also showed complete disregard for IZ's authority and dismissed its resolutions for not being Islamic. Around Barcic gathered a small group of devoted followers, of wahabi-like outside appearance that followed Barcic on his dawa trips to Bosnian villages. Since the beginning of 2007, Barcic and his group caused many provocations among the local Muslims and IZ's officials by taking over the mosques and preaching their version of Islam. In some of the villages, their behavior caused an open conflict with the locals, which sometimes escalated to physical aggression.

⁹ "Sta je, po vama, vehabizam i jeste li vehabija?", <http://www.darulquran.org>, 4.12.2006; "Saff: Razgovor s povodom: Mr. Safet Kudozovic", www.studio-din.com, 29.3.2007.

¹⁰ i.e.: <http://minber.ba>, <http://www.el-ihlas.com>, etc.

¹¹ <http://www.el-asr.com>.

¹² The web site is no longer active.

¹³ Barcic was a representative of the IIRO branch in Zenica (BiH).

Mohammed Porca was believed to be the main financier behind Barčić's group (Alic, 2007). Before these incidents reached their epilogue, Jusuf Barčić (40) got killed in a car accident at the end of March 2007 near Tuzla (BiH). About 3000-5000 sympathizers, arriving with organized buses from Slovenia and Sarajevo and cars from Austria, Germany and Sandžak, attended the burial. His devoted students dispersed and remained active within various Islamist groups. After his death, Barčić became some sort of a martyr to Bosnian Islamists. He is regarded highly by all the Bosnian radical groups and his lectures are published on their web sites.

An important role in spreading wahabi dawa have also former activists/sympathizers of AMY (Active Muslim Youth) and former mujahedeen, however their influence has declined considerably in the past few years (AMY closed down, mujahedeen facing deportation, etc.). The Islamist newspaper Saff¹⁴ (former AMY's newspaper) partially reflects their legacy. Saff tackles current political issues of Muslims worldwide and is particularly critical of events concerning Bosnian Muslims, taking most of the time the position that is closer to the wahabi stance than that of the IZ. Apart from BiH, Saff is sold also in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, US, Canada, Holland, Luxemburg, Australia, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Russia, France and some Arab countries, which testifies to its popularity.

1.2 Global jihad group

The main ideologues of this group express their views on the web site 'Put vjernika' ('The path of believers' – formerly known as 'Islamska država' - Islamic state).¹⁵ Most of them reside in Vienna and they started to propagate their views within the wahabi group of Mohammed Porca. Soon, they turned to a much more radical agenda and their current ideological platform contains typical elements of global jihadi groups: they openly support Al-Qaida, mujahedeen organizations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Caucasus, Kashmir, Palestinian territories, etc. Their wish is to establish an Islamic state ruled according to shariah, and they believe that the only way to achieve this is through an armed conflict. Updates from jihadi fronts are regularly published on the web site, as well as any major decisions, fatwas or declarations by the main jihadi ideologues (i.e. Bin Laden, Al-Zawahiri, Attiyetullah, Al-Awlaki, Chechen leaders, etc.).-

The group considers itself as part of global jihad movement and its members argue that every 'true' Muslim should contribute to it in any way possible. They believe that their aims cannot be achieved through the participation in political structures of the states (i.e. parliamentarian voting) and they consider such participation un-Islamic. They refuse to work through the established system, because they want to change it and replace it as a whole with an Islamic state. As good though not perfect examples of successful jihad are cited Taliban regime and Islamic courts in Somalia, which were achieved only because of the armed combat of the mujahedeen.¹⁶

¹⁴ <http://saff.ba>.

¹⁵ <http://www.putvjernika.com>, <http://www.islamskadrzava.org>.

¹⁶ "Pitanje o metodi uspostavljanja hilafeta", <http://www.putvjernika.com>, 25.11.2009.

The radical content of the web site did not escape Bosnian media's attention when the following question and answer appeared in one of the site's sections: "Is it a sin for a man to arm himself with the explosives and blow himself up among the group of kafirs?" The answer given by Nusret Imamovic, one of web site's dais from BiH, was: "We do not consider this kind of fight to be forbidden, although, at the same time, we believe it should not be used in the same way as classical weapons, but only in exceptional situations. Allah knows best!"¹⁷

Like the wahabi dais, also the global jihad group is very active in proliferating its views. In addition to an abundance of video and audio material available on the web site, the Bosnian dais associated with the group used to give live lectures in pal talk rooms. The details of the lecture (title, name of the lecturer, date and hour, name of the virtual room) were scheduled and published on the web site in advance.¹⁸ This kind of 'virtual mosque' is a clever way to spread the group's message from Vienna to their sympathizers in BiH and elsewhere. The group is also active in organizing Islamic gatherings - one of them took place between 18 and 20 July 2008 in Gornja Maoca (BiH), with lecturers coming from Vienna and BiH. Their internet activities are also expanding: a section for women was added recently with two subsections entitled: 'Woman in Islam' and 'Muslim Woman in jihad', and additional web sites are being opened with more propaganda material.

Ensarije serijata – SOS (Supporters of Shariah) Bosna is another global jihad group in BiH, which used to run their own web site in Bosnian language until recently (now only the forum affiliated with the web site remained). SOS Bosna is a group of Bosnian supporters of London sheikh Abu Hamza el-Misri, the head of the group Supporters of Sharia (Ar. Ensaru al shariah). Al-Misri, currently imprisoned in UK for inciting to terrorism, is a known supporter of Bin Laden and Al-Qaida. He often claimed that he worked with the Muslim community in BiH and used video footage of Serbs killed during the war in BiH as advertising material for recruiting new Islamic warriors. On the web site of Bosnian branch, the group describes its role as Muslims 'who wish to deliver the message of Islam in its whole' and explains that the organization was set up to help mujahedeen and refugees in countries such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kashmir, etc. This help consists from "participating in the front line, military training, Islamic education, countering anti-Islamic propaganda and studying the history in order to understand the message and not to be deceived by Western-European society".¹⁹ The web site featured fatwas, speeches and books of Al-Misri and the latest news about his imprisonment and his appointed

¹⁷ Original transcript: "Pitanje: Da li je grijeh da se čovjek opasa dinamitom i raznese među grupom kafira? Odgovor: Ovakav vid borbe ne smatramo zabranjenim, ali isto tako ne mislimo da ga treba koristiti kao što se koristi klasično uobičajeno oružje, nego samo u izuzetnim prilikama i situacijama.-A Allah najbolje zna. Odgovorio: Nusret Imamović". (<http://www.putvjernika.com>, 18.11. 2008 – the question and answer were removed from the website).

¹⁸ The schedule of the lectures used to be published on the web site of "Islamska drzava".-The current global jihad web site "Put Vjernika" does not publish the schedule anymore, however there is evidence that the lectures in pal talk rooms still continue. The pal talk rooms are used for lectures also by wahabi and takfeer groups.

¹⁹ The web site is no longer active (the reference to the web site content is from October 2007).

representatives. It published various literature and discussions on Islamic topics - especially on jihad, suicide terrorism, killings of civilians - and translations of texts of global jihadi dais. It also included an electronic magazine 'A Letter 'el-Jihad' and audio/video material. All the material on the website was in Bosnian language.

1.3 Takfeer group

The takfeer group has a distant relative in the movement of Takfeer wal-Hijra which emerged in Egypt in the 70s. Takfeer wal-Hijra claimed that the society deviated from the teachings of Islam and labeled it a 'kafir' (infidel) society. To takfeer somebody or something means pronouncing them infidel (kafir). The group, therefore, first advocated hijra – separation from the infidel society – and from such hijra sites an active resistance to state power could be launched. This modern Khawarijite²⁰ like attitude promotes not only the fight against non-believers but justifies also the actions against Muslims.

In modern takfeer groups, similar attitude is reflected when it comes to mujahedeen and mainstream Muslims. Both are considered by takfeer groups as un-Islamic because, they do not understand Islamic scriptures correctly and their actions are full of kufr (disbelief) and shirk (evil, sin of committing polytheism, worshipping other than Allah). The jihad that mujahedeen fight is based on wrong religious understandings and is, therefore, not a real jihad. Due to this belief, the group takfeers organizations like Al-Qaida, Taliban movement, mujahedeen in Iraq and Caucasus, national oriented Muslim movements like Hamas as well as individual religious ideologues of global jihad (i.e. Al-Maqdisi²¹, Al-Zawahiri, bin Laden, etc.).

Takfeer is central to this group's beliefs. In their opinion, every 'true' Muslim has to be able to identify shirk and it is his obligation to takfeer the ones that cause it. Definitions of shirk are complex and are based on Islamic scriptures. The takfeer group admits as valid sources Quran and carefully selected collections of Hadiths (narrations of words and deeds of prophet Muhammed) and recognizes only certain religious scholars (i.e. Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyya, Al-Wahhab). Such dawa implies that for every opinion regarding Islam one has to present a proof from accepted sources. And when it is proved that somebody or something is a kafir, it is an obligation for a Muslim to agree with that and takfeer everyone else that refuse to do the same. In the opposite case, he becomes a kafir himself and loses his place in dzennet (heaven). This is the rule of the so-called 'chain takfeer' which became extreme in takfeer group and caused heated arguments with other Islamist groups. It also places a great deal of responsibility and pressure on a believer, which has to be able to interpret Islamic scriptures correctly, without the advice of religious authorities.²²⁻

²⁰ *The Khawarij were 7th century movement that withdraw from the greater Muslim community, declaring other believers infidels, and waged war against other Muslims, causing division and civil war. They made jihad a fundamental article of their faith – a sixth pillar. To impose their strict doctrine they would wage violent jihad against both Muslims and non-Muslims. (Dekmejian, 1995).*

²¹ *i.e. Al-Maqdisi was deemed kafir because he accepted to be tried on a taghut (non-Islamic) court.*

²² *More on takfeer dawa: Ed-Dehil, 2008.*

Although takfeer groups do not recognize the jihad of mujahedeen as legitimate it does not mean they renounce it. They still consider it a basic Muslim obligation, which lasts until judgment day. The leader of Muslims cannot be a true leader without jihad and the Islamic faith cannot be established without it. Jihad is an obligation to any group, which is big and strong enough to fight against the enemies of Allah in any way possible (with tongue, hand, heart or its numbers).²³ But first, this group has to have a correct understanding of Islamic faith, otherwise a true Islamic state cannot be established. Whenever such group capable of leading a real jihad will appear, the takfeer groups will join it. The jihad can. Therefore. begin anywhere, and is not limited or conditioned by the current jihadi centers.

Takfeer dawa strictly forbids any cooperation with ‘taghut’ (infidel, secular, rejecting shariah law) structures.²⁴ It also condemns any ‘innovations’ in Islam, emphasizes tawheed and has a strong anti-Shiite stance. The group is against any kind of discrimination based on financial status, nationality, ethnicity, etc - the members are judged only by the correctness of their belief and devotion to Allah.²⁵

Among Bosnian Muslims, takfeer dawa started first to appear on the web site ‘Kelimetulhaq’ (Word of Truth).²⁶ The site was first affiliated with the global jihad web site ‘Islamska drzava’, and had a similar content, focusing on jihad. The main ideologue whose lectures and writings were most frequently published on ‘Kelimetulhaq’ was Ebu Muhammed. Ebu Muhammed, a former student at the University in Medina, currently living in Vienna, is a charismatic dai, who started to preach his dawa within the circles of Porca, then took a more radical direction together with the global jihadi Bosnian dais in Vienna and, at the end, turn to the takfeer dawa (his lectures were initially published also on ‘Islamska drzava’, but were removed completely after the split).-

Already from the beginning his preaching was very radical, promoting intolerance, often taking takfeer interpretation and emphasizing jihad as an obligation to every true Muslim (Beganovic, 2006). His radical orientation was observed also by Austrian authorities and in 2005, the Austrian antiterrorism unit in Vienna asked prosecutors to bring charges against him and another cleric, Armin Bibars, for justifying London bomb attacks in the Austrian media (Kocina, Nowak, 2005). Ebu Muhammed and Bibars were preachers in the Sahaba mosque - the mosque that had already been under police surveillance for a number of radical dais that preached there. Ebu Muhammed’s negative influence was observed also with the group of Muslim youths from Sandzak (Serbia), responsible for several violent incidents that took place between 2005 and 2007.

²³ “Obaveza džihada nikada neće spasti sa ummeta“, <http://www.el-tewhid.com>, 8.1.2008.

²⁴ For some of the groups even a simple action like accepting the license agreement for installing software on computers could lead to kufir.

²⁵ The Taliban, for example, insist that the Emir can be only an Afghan.

²⁶ The web site is no longer active.

Together with a couple of other radical non-Bosnian dais that preached in Sahaba, Ebu Muhammed eventually turned to takfeer dawa. The group found their main ideologue in Kuwaiti Sheikh Ebu Merjem. Ebu Merjem gives live lectures in chat rooms and his dawa is published on several web sites in various languages (French, Dutch, Danish, German, Bosnian, Albanian, Arabic, Slovenian, etc.).²⁷-

An influential Bosnian takfeer group, closely connected with Ebu Muhammed is djemat El-Tewhid, located in Holland. They run a website with the same name²⁸, publishing writings and audio lectures by Ebu Meryem, Ebu Muhammed and Ebu Ahmed (Bosnian dai and a colleague of Ebu Muhammed). The affiliated web sites include a separate web site for women²⁹, which indicates an active role of women also within takfeer dawa.-

An important aspect characterizing the Bosnian takfeer group is their offensive stance toward the IZ and other Islamist groups. They write long documents, produce videos and lectures as well as engage in heated discussions to demonstrate that the religious interpretations and acts done by the IZ and other Islamist groups are not in accordance with Islam (i.e.: The True Face of (un)Islamic Community - videos speaking against the IZ of BiH, Sandzak and Slovenia; Triumph of religious monotheism over the dawa of Shirk and nationalism - Ebu Muhammed's answer to Semir Imamovic, ed. of wahabi newspaper Saff, etc.).³⁰ This attitude inherent in the concept of takfeer (for takfeer applies generally to believers) redirects intolerance toward fellow Muslims.

2 RADICALIZATION PROCESS – EXAMPLES

The two cases examined below illustrate the role of dawa structures in radicalization process.

2.1 Sandzak cell

In July 2009, 11 members of an Islamist cell from Sandzak (Serbia) were convicted of planning terrorist attacks and illegal arms possession. They were charged with planning the assassination of Sandzak's mufti Muamer Zukorlic, attacks on the mosque and police station in Novi Pazar and setting up the camp for military and terrorist training on the hill Ninaja near Novi Pazar.

The group was arrested in March 2007, when the Serbian police discovered a military training camp on a hill near Novi Pazar, containing large amounts of arms, explosives and other military equipment. Five people were arrested at the time. About a month later, on April 20, the police raided a house in Donja Trnava near Novi Pazar,

²⁷ i.e. <http://tanoshimi.free.fr>; <http://thirrja-ne-teuhid.com>, <http://www.al-muwahidun.com>.

²⁸ <http://www.el-tewhid.com>.

²⁹ <http://www.suza-za-tewhidom.com>.

³⁰ Original titles: "Pravo lice (ne)islamske zajednice"; "Trijumf vjetrovjesnackog monoteizma nad dawom shirka i nacionalizma".-The video and text were published on the web site of Kelimetulhaq in 2007. Some of the videos and texts are still accessible on youtube and other takfeer web sites.

acting on a tip that the house serves as a hideout for some of the members of the group connected to the training camp. An armed struggle erupted with the Serbian police in which one of the members of the cell, 28-year-old Ismail Prentic, was shot dead and two other people were injured.

The timeline of the group's radicalization process:

Since summer 2005, a group of Muslims, of wahabi-like appearance, from Novi Pazar (Sandzak), started to exhibit an increasingly aggressive behavior toward local IZ's officials in mosques. They took the 'tespihs' (Muslim prayer beads) from several mosques and throw them in the nearby river. Often the group interrupted religious services and provoked worshippers. They would pick quarrels and start heated debates with religious officials about the improper conduct of prayers. Similar behavior appeared also in neighboring countries.

- In March 2006, in order to prevent further incidents, IZ issued its first Resolution on Constitutional Changes and Interpretation of Islam “due to observance of interpretations of Islam that are outside the tradition of Bosnian Muslims”.³¹ In the same month, 16 wahabi dais signed public resolution against takfeer.³² According to IZ and some of the dais from the wahabi group, the group behind the incidents was influenced by the kind of ideas that were reflected on the web site of ‘Kelimetulhaq’ and propagated by Ebu Muhammed (at the time still preaching global jihadi dawa, with an already visible inclination toward takfeer ideas) (Beganovic, 2006). Both the IZ and wahabi group condemned such interpretations and violent behavior that caused serious tensions among Muslims.
- In June 2006 in the center of Novi Pazar, a group of Muslim youths disrupted the concert of group Balkanika. According to the reports, a group of 10 youths with beard and short pants came on the stage and throw down part of the instruments, causing considerable damage. One of them took the microphone and asked people to go home, because the band works against Islam”. -In the incident, Fuad Hodzic, Senad Ramovic and Ismail Prentic, all three of them members of the convicted group, were involved.
- In August 2006 Ismail Prentic was seen as one of the guests at the Islamic gathering in Plav (Montenegro). Such Islamic gatherings were regularly organized (the 6th gathering took place in August 2006) by wahabi dais and Prentic and his brother Mirsad (both members of the convicted group) were regular visitors.³³ Such gatherings are popular among young Muslims inclined toward wahabi dawa and attract also visitors from abroad.
- On November 3, 2006 in Novi Pazar, a supporter of a local mufti Zukorlic fired gun shots into a wahabi group of Muslims outside the Arap mosque. Three wahabis were injured by the gunfire – two of them, Jasmin and Erhan Smailovic were members of the convicted group. The violent confrontation was connected to an earlier incident on the same day, which occurred due to a dispute over religious rituals.

³¹ “Rezolucija o ustavnim promjenama i tumacenju Islama”, <http://www.rijaset.ba>, 27.3.2006.

³² “Što je više kleveta i laži”, http://www.bhdani.com/print.asp?kat=fok&broj_id=459&tekst_rb=3, Dani: No. 459, 31.3.2006.

³³ “Vođa terorista posećivao Plav”, <http://www.novosti.rs>, 24.4.2007.

- On November 8, 2006, IZ published an addendum to the March resolution, as it was noticed that despite the first resolution the improper aggressive behavior of individuals and groups still continues, referring to the incident in the Arap mosque.³⁴
- In December 2006, various letters, explanations and articles in support of the wahabis involved in the shooting incident appeared on the web site ‘Kelimetulhaq’, which clearly linked the web site to the group.³⁵
- March 17, 2007 – discovery of the training camp.
- Beginning of April 2007 – the Kosovo Police Service issued a warrant for Ismail Prentic for illegal firearms possession and smuggling weapons across the administrative boundary between Kosovo and Serbia.
- April 20, 2007 – shooting in Donja Trnava in which Ismail Prentic lost his life
- May 2007 – the web site ‘Kelimetulhaq’ published a shahid-like picture of Prentic, expressing regrets over the death of “our brother shehid in the hands of kufr”.
- January 2008 – ‘Kelimetulhaq’ continued to publish the latest reports regarding the judging process of the convicted group, expressing sympathies with convicted brothers, until it closed down. The reports continued on the web site ‘Put Vjernika’.³⁶

Some important facts that came up during the trial should be mentioned: the aggressive behavior of the group’s members was focused mainly against the Muslims due to the disputes on religious matters. Their main target was the Sandzak mufti appointed by the IZ in BiH. Twelve of the convicted members did not want to be represented by lawyers because they did not recognize the non-shariatic court and stated that they can be judged only by Allah. When they were defending themselves they often used verses from Quran to explain their actions.³⁷ They also asked to be allowed to wear specific religious clothing in court (white caps and short above ankles trousers), to be allowed to perform all their prayers and not to be obliged to stand up, when the judging board enters, because “it is forbidden by their religion to stand up to anyone”.³⁸ The propaganda material which was found on their computers included typical global jihad literature and videos, published on web sites of ‘Kelimetulhaq’ and ‘Islamska drzava’.³⁹ There was evidence that the group established contacts with other members and mentors of similar religious orientation from BiH, Saudi Arabia and Austria through email and telephone. They also admitted to be in contact with Nusret Imamovic (dai from BiH connected to global jihad group) and Ebu Muhammed.⁴⁰

³⁴ “Rijasetova dopunjena rezolucija o tumacenju Islama”, <http://www.rijaset.ba>, 8.11.2006.

³⁵ “Ovo je ono sto vam je vas Gospodar obecao - reagovanja na nedavne nemile dogadzaje u N.Pazaru” (This is what your Lord promised you – reactions to the unfortunate events in N. Pazar), published by-Kelimetulhaq in December 2006.

³⁶ <http://www.putvjernika.com>, forum, 3.7.2009.

³⁷ “Vehabije se brane citirajući Kuran”, <http://www.naslovi.net/2008-01-18/mondo/vehabije-se-brane-citirajuci-kuran/548483>, 18.1.2008.

³⁸ “Cirkus u specijalnom sudu”, <http://www.naslovi.net/2008-01-18/kurir/cirkus-u-specijalnom-sudu/548324>, 18.1.2008.

³⁹ Messages of Bin Laden, mujahedeen videos,-the brochure “Isukana sablja”, which speaks about how to respond when somebody insults prophet Muhammed (still published on Put vjernika), etc. (“SMS poruke kao dokazi na suđenju” <http://www.naslovi.net/2009-01-13/b92/sms-poruke-kao-dokazi-na-sudjenju/994960>, 13.1.2009.)

⁴⁰ <http://www.putvjernika.com/forum/vijesti-i-aktuelni-dogadjaji/sudjenje-braci-iz-novog-pazara-t337.html>, 5.7.2009.

2.2 Recruiting process of takfeer groups

On May 18, 2008, four audio lectures entitled: ‘Confession of a former takfeer member and his return to the salvation group’⁴¹ were published on the web site ‘Islamska drzava’. The lectures included a speech by a former member of the takfeer group Abdul Kerim and commentaries of three main ideologists of the Bosnian global jihad group: Ebu Idriz, Idriz Bilibani and Adem Demirovic. The lectures were first aired on pal talk and later recorded for the web site.

Kerim, a secretary of a mejlis in Luxemburg, has been an active practitioner of Islam for about 4-5 years, when he came across takfeer interpretations. His interest in takfeer dawa started in summer 2007 when he came in contact with French speaking citizens of Arab origins, who were spreading Abu Meryem’s dawa in Luxemburg. Soon, Kerim came into contact with Ebu Muhammed and other Bosnian brothers from Vienna. His belief in the correctness of takfeer dawa grew stronger and he opened web sites and forums to propagate it. As a secretary, he used his position to spread the dawa among the members of his mejlis. The basic principles of takfeer dawa, such as chain takfeer, correct identification of shirk, etc., slowly caused Kerim to stop frequenting the mosques and sever the contacts with his other Muslim friends, because he did not want to fall into shirk by not takfeering them or for being in contact with potential kafirs. He began to stay at home and became increasingly isolated. He stayed in contact only with people from the takfeer group through the internet and a couple of friends from his home djemat. He was convinced that only members and dais of his takfeer group have the correct proofs regarding the faith. His isolation and preoccupation with the takfeer beliefs resulted in some kind of paranoid psychosis, causing him to constantly doubt about who he is allowed to see or speak with, which books can he read, etc. He tekfeered many brothers from the djemat, mostly without any good proof, but only out of fear that he might step out of his faith. Eventually, he left his position of secretary in the mejlis.-

What provoked in Kerim doubts about the takfeer dawa was his love toward the mujahedeen. He started to examine proofs for takfeer against Bin Laden and the mujahedeen and noticed a series of irregularities. He began to look for other opinions and turned for advice to the dais of the global jihad group, who eventually managed to convince him to abandon the takfeer dawa, repent and return to their group. His speech was highly emotional. He regretted takfeering his brothers in Luxemburg and asked for forgiveness. He was also deeply grateful to Demirovic, Bilibani and Imamovic (the dais from global jihad group), who showed him the ‘correct path’.-

Conclusion and Some Security Concerns

The dawa of each of the three groups discussed, contributes in a different way to the radicalization process. The salafy/wahabi group started off with claims to religious authority, parallel and independent from that of the IZ. Despite their relatively moderate position and their long-term dawa orientation when compared to global

⁴¹ Original title: “Pokajanje bivseg tekfirca i povratak spasenoi skupini”.

jihad and takfeer groups, this group proliferates Islam that differs sharply from the moderate, much more liberal, Hanafi-School-based Islam, adopted by the IZ and majority of Bosnian Muslims. Initially, this caused clashes with the IZ, to which the IZ responded accordingly. When clashes escalated, this group distanced itself from radical elements and took a more moderate stance focusing rather on dawa than on power ambitions. This attitude allowed the group to operate more freely with some sort of silent consent from the IZ. Despite their peaceful activities, these dawa structures export a slow but constant flow of a particular kind of Islam, foreign to Bosnian traditions, which offers a perfect platform for setting off to more radical waters. Many of the radical Bosnian dais come from this group, and it is this group that provides the necessary ideological and also practical means to set up independent Muslim communities, which leads their members to further isolation and intensifies conflict with the rest of society. It is problematic to define this group in terms of security threat as its activities are kept within the laws of democratic societies. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that its dawa conveys undemocratic principles such as intolerance toward other social and religious groups, promoting shariatic law, diminishing the rights of women, etc., which further deepen the division between ‘the true believers’ and the rest and may cause tensions and conflicts within a democratic order.-

The Bosnian global jihad group and its dais were in many ways a product of salafy/wahabi dawa. Similar dominant concepts appear in both groups, such as literal interpretation of Islamic scriptures, disdain for western political systems and lifestyle, rejections of moderate Islam, hatred toward Shiite Muslims and the importance of the concepts of tawheed, takfeer and jihad. Among all these concepts, the global jihad group above all focused its attention on the latter and sees jihad (armed combat) as the only and the correct way to advance its aims. This makes it a fervent supporter of global jihadi movements, even when it comes to their most radical versions. Working from diaspora and inside BiH, the group is building a convenient network and through variety of dawa channels successfully spreading its radical message. The views propagated by this group are obviously problematic and give rise to security concerns. Its ideas were clearly reflected in the motives of some of the Bosnian radicalized groups and some of its dais had an important influence on or been in contact with the group’s members (i.e. the case of the Sandzak group).--

If we compare a takfeer group to the global jihad group, we could say that the main difference is that the focus is shifted from jihad to takfeer. That means that for this group to be a ‘true believer’ (the concept inherent in takfeer) takes priority over the armed struggle, even though the jihad still remains a highly important obligation. The messages of takfeer groups are subtly cloaked in religious terminology, so they might appear innocent and less radical comparing to the global jihadi dawa. Nevertheless, they imply an elitist and uncompromising detachment from Muslim and non-Muslim society, which isolates the individuals and gets them completely absorbed with the Islam they preach. As we could see in the Abdul Kerim’s case, the indoctrination methods of takfeer dawa, are very powerful, rapid and work almost in a sectarian like way. This makes the takfeer dawa radical and dangerous.

Kerim's decision to eventually join the global jihad group also reflects an interesting point: the two groups, whose dais were formerly friends, know each others weak points well and exploit it accordingly, especially when potential recruits are at stake. Their similar radical orientation makes it possible for individuals to pass from one group to another. The flexibility and overlapping of Islamist groups' agenda as well as their complementary roles in a radicalization process can be well observed in the case of the Sandzak group. The influence of all the three Islamist groups was at work - from the initial salafy/wahabi one (disputes over different interpretations of Islam) to that of the global jihad (violent acts, armed conflict) and, finally, the takfeer (the group's aggressive actions were primarily directed against other Muslims - the officials of the IZ).

The three Islamists groups have a similar target audience and compete for power not only with official, moderate Islamic structures, but also with each other. Their claims to religious authority are based on the concept 'holier than though'⁴², which has an important effect: when the salafy/wahabi group countered IZ's traditional 'communistic Islam' with its pure literal interpretations, supported by Bosnian dais, educated in Islam at prestigious Islamic universities abroad, the IZ could not simply dismiss them. It had to find a way of incorporating them in the system, which, in a long term, will surely have an important impact on the perceptions of Islam among Bosnian Muslims. The growing numbers of wahabi sympathizers support this. A similar process is also noticed among global jihad and takfeer groups. The strong critique of global jihad/mujahedeen movements by takfeer groups, with proofs rooted deeply in Islamic scriptures caused the jihadi ideologues to place greater emphasis on exact and correct interpretations of their visions of Islam. Their aims and the means to achieve them are redefined accordingly: establishment of an Islamic state and shariatic law with no concessions and no national or other limitations, any cooperation with taghut structures (voting, juridical system, international organizations, etc.) is strictly forbidden, any other ideological inputs (i.e. nationalistic, ethnic and similar) are rejected, etc. In this way, the space for mediation, compromise or agreement with such groups is becoming much smaller.-

When analyzing the Bosnian Islamists, we cannot bypass the concept of the Umma, which is crucial to understanding the way the Islamist groups operate. Umma stands for the community of Muslims, being conditioned only by the correct faith - Islam - making any national, state, ethnic or any other limitation irrelevant (this is also one of the aspects of global jihadi ideology that appeals strongly to the feelings of discrimination among Muslims, particularly in the western world). Therefore any events involving Muslims and Islam (i.e. the Palestinian issue, caricatures of the Prophet, etc.) can become a matter of concern for all Muslims. Islamists are particularly good in exploiting this rationale and appeal on emotions of their fellow Muslims by turning such events into global problems, to which each Muslim has a duty to act on. This is why a call to jihad against Denmark (for publishing the caricatures) can appeal

⁴² *The usage of this concept and the consequences are reflected well in Saudi Islamist opposition to Saudi rulers (Teitelbaum, 2000; Kostiner, 1996).*

also to radicalized Bosnian Muslims, and explicit letters calling for the lynch of the Swedish caricaturist Lars Vilks can be found on the web sites of Bosnian Islamists. Therefore, when examining the security aspect of Bosnian Islamists, one should not be limited to the geographical borders of BiH or its neighboring countries and neither should one consider their intentions and goals to be limited to or concerned with the specifics of that area. The Islamist ideology, which, in its most extreme form, advocates terrorist acts, applies globally.

Considering the extent of the Bosnian Islamists' dawa activities in various European countries, we can assume that in addition to the homeland, the diaspora units also present an important target audience. For such global aspirations, the internet becomes a cheap, powerful and convenient tool for Bosnian Islamist groups to spread their message across the Umma. Such virtual dawa structures can create an 'autonomous' radicalization process, for which no personal indoctrination by radical preachers is needed and participants in this dawa structures (i.e. chat rooms) progressively infect themselves and one another with the radical Islamic ideology (AIVD, 2004). They are easily accessible to everyone, provide satisfactory ideological answers, supported by Bosnian dais, who were educated at Islamic universities abroad, as well as provide materials written in their mother tongue and offer familiarity that comes within a common ethnic origin – all these factors allow a rapid process of radicalization.

The influence of the Bosnian Islamist groups discussed above is hard to determine, especially when taking into account their activities in the diaspora. It is however, fair to say that their views and interpretations of Islam are still very limited among Bosnian Muslims in BiH as well as in the diaspora groups. Nevertheless, such ideology, which partly reflects the agenda of the global jihadi movements like Al-Qaida and similar groups, is present among Bosnian Muslims and its influence has been observed on a number of radicalization cases involving Bosnian Muslims, which ended in violent incidents, with some of them amounting to an explicit terrorist agenda (i.e. Mirsad Bektasevic's case in 2005, two arrested Islamist groups in Sandzak in 2007, the latest arrests of members of an Islamist group in BiH in December 2009, etc.). Cases, involving radicalized Bosnian Muslims, keep popping up and should not be simply dismissed as isolated locally produced acts, especially when considered against the background of the well-structured dawa network and its undeniable contribution to the radicalization process, and when their agenda and motives are clearly similar - if not the same - to the ones espoused by the most radical Islamist movements.

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