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University of Amsterdam, 20 March 2003

GUEST LECTURE “EXTENT OF ISLAMIST TERRORISM IN THE BALKANS”

For the course “Islam and terrorism in Russia and Eastern Europe” given by dr. Erik van Ree and dr. Marc Jansen of the section European Studies & East-Europe Institute, University of Amsterdam

Topic: The extent of Islamist (and other types of) terrorism in the Balkans since the death of Tito – with a focus on the activities of the Kosova Liberation Army (UÇK) and Al Qaeda in the former Yugoslavia since 1992: significant old and new threats to the stability of the region, Europe, the West and beyond?

QUESTIONS

1) To what degrees have Islamic extremism and terrorism or other forms of violence taken hold on the Balkans since 1980, particularly in the period between 1992 and the present?

a) To what extent and why has any Islamic extremism and terrorism grown among the Bosnian Muslims en the Albanians, an to what degree and why has this been stimulated externally by

- Al Qaeda or its original nucleus, the ‘Islamic Front against Jews and Crusaders’**
- Other Islamist-extremist movements that have no organizational ties with Al Qaeda**

b) To what extent and why can any such Islamic extremism and terrorism increase in the Balkans in the foreseeable future, even if these movements have been marginal or even non-existent over the last few decades?

2) What kinds of threats and risks emanate from any past, present or future forms of Islamic extremism/terrorism in or from the Balkans for the wider region, Europe and the whole West including the US, and other parts of the world?

Kinds of threats and destabilising patterns:

- a. underground and cover organizations, hiding places and bases from which to strike (organisation);**
- b. spread of extreme-islamic beliefs through indoctrination of members through *madrassas* (Islamic schools as structured in Pakistan) and the conversion of entire communities (ideology);**
- c. terrorist violence with fatalities and wounded (violence);**
- d. weakening of (democratic) states and their policies as a result of patterns a, b or c (legitimacy).**

CONCLUSIONS

The answers to these research questions are to be found in my handwritten notes for the lecture; I do not present my answers and findings here in detail, in order to protect my

copyrights. I still intend to use these for an academic article on Islamist terrorism, and to incorporate some of these in my final PhD thesis.

Suffice to say that, despite the wars in the former Yugoslavia during the '90s in which *mujahedeen* from abroad occasionally played significant roles, radicalization toward violent Islamism has been limited – even virtually negligent – among Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims), Albanians and other communities with a predominantly Muslim faith in the Balkans. This is partially due to the significant contrasts between the moderate 'Ottoman' version of Islam these communities adhere to and the much more radical Wahhabism and other versions of Islam that predominate in the Middle East. Another major reason is that many Bosniaks and Albanians are still thankful to the US for the latter's eventual interventions on their behalf in '95 and '99 against the Bosnian-Serb and Serbian regimes respectively. The efforts by Al Qaeda, other terrorist organizations, and clerical institutions and relief organizations from Saudi Arabia and other Arab states to 'convert' these Balkan communities to their form of Islam have up till now met with little success. Yet the continuing pouring of money and manpower into Bosnia, Albania and Kosovo may on the longer term create sizable 'Wahhabist' minorities within these countries. Still, Islamic extremists have and will have a much easier time in recruiting, indoctrinating and otherwise (mis)using members of Muslim communities in Western Europe, mainly because these communities are of identical or similar ethnicity and cultural background as these terrorists.

The main danger emanating from the Balkans, apparent since the mid-90s, is the easy infiltration of Al-Qaeda members and other Islamic terrorists into weak states like Bosnia and Albania, where the arms trade and other forms of criminality thrive. These countries are ideal places to hide and prepare operations to be conducted elsewhere; the terrorists have always sympathizers among the locals, however tiny these numbers are compared to the overwhelming majorities of religiously moderate – and pro-Western - Bosnians and Albanians. In sum, I do not expect any major terrorist acts by Albanian or other Balkan muslims in the coming decade or beyond.

Caspar ten Dam, Leiden, 25 January 2005