Indoctrinating Albanians Dynamics of Islamic Aid

As a result of policies that have basically de- female addressing rural Kosova's social and ec- onomic needs to organizations whose basic modus operandi is the religious indoctrina- tion of the population, much of Kosova- va's rural society is being isolated from their fellow countrymen and the world at large. A result of such isolation is the increasing vul- nerability of Kosovo's Muslims to hostility emanating from those very Western gov- ernments that neglected to address their initial needs. It is therefore ironic that as self-proclaimed Western societies cower be- fore the 'rise of Islamic fundamentalism', their discriminatory policies towards Kosso- va's 'Muslim' population may prove to be directly responsible for the production of Europe's own 'Talibani', which in the future may indeed prove hostile to 'Western values and interests'.

Future Talibani?
The central problem is not doctrinal but socio-economic. After decades of discrimi- nation and two years of war resulting in the murder of much of the adult male popula- tion in rural areas, Kosova's peasants are liv- ing in abject poverty. Many rural communi- ties in Kosovo have, as a result, become more or less dependent on outside NGOs. The most active in rural Kosovo has been the Saudi Joint Committee for the Relief of Kosova and Chechnya (SJCRC), which has provided for the basic daily needs of over a hundred communities. While food, housing, clothing and supplies are being provided by the SJCRC, its primary task has been education. The forced sequestration of the sexes in schools, the focus on young male education based on the memorization of the Qur'an, and little or any emphasis on what many consider essential survival skills have attracted the suspicion of Kosova's indigenous Muslim and secular leaders.

As a consequence, upon hostility towards Saudi efforts to control the content of the spiritual lives of Albanians, the destruction of many of the historical sites deemed by Western diplomats' 'idolatry', and other confrontations be- tween indigenous forms of religious prac- tices and what many see as 'Arab cultural assimilation' have become manifest. While small numbers of Albanians from the former Yugoslavia still go to study Islamic theology in the Arabic-speaking world (many par- olled to study under the now deceased Al- banian-born scholar, Nasir al Din al'Alani), the vast majority have been exposed to a huge cultural contact with the larger Islamic world. The recent influences from the out- side, with their substantial aid packages, have clearly changed this. The nature of this change is creating an environment that pits local organizations trying to maintain Islamic traditions, as personified by Reverend Boja and the Albanian grand mutfi, Hafiz Koci, against those influenced by imported practices.

Despite their efforts, with little or no fi- nancial resources of their own and the neg- lect of interest among the members of Kosova's internationally imposed adminis- trators, Kosova's leaders are incapable of providing an alternative to the Salafi educa- tional practices that were being propagated in many parts of rural Kosovo. The SJCRC reported in late 2001 to have invested four million Saudi riyals in Kosova. Nearly half of that (about USD 500,000) had been spent to sponsor 388 religious 'propagators' (i.e. mis- sionaries) in the immediate post-war period. As with these propagators, whom I would call experts in post-conflict assessment – did identify the community most suit- able to their agenda. While there are no offic- ial numbers published, at least 98 mosque complexes with and without accompanying schools have been built in rural Kosova as a result of their work. One can draw compar- isons to Afghan communities in the 1980s when large numbers of orphaned and sin- gle-parent families were being transported on Saudi 'charity' in the border refugee camps of Pakistan. As with Afghan, rural Kosova's dependency on the 'generosity' of others, have become vulnerable to 'foreign' doctrines and practices.

In many ways local resistance to SJCRC has taken on the tone of general hostility to- wards Arabs that is being beamed across the globe by Americans is a com- mon theme among self-identified Muslims today. This sense of exclusion is being used in some quarters to shift community loy- alties away from Europe and the United States. Such a sense of increasing isolation, as European, US, and non-denominational organizations continue to ignore the spiri- tual, educational, and cultural needs of local populations, breeds the kind of resent- ment needed to produce a new generation of supra-ethnic anti-Western causes.

With more than 98 primary and secondary schools built throughout rural Kosova, the creation of a new generation of Albanian Muslims is underway. As the outside world has given free rein to Saudi-based organi- zations, eager to proselytize as other evan- gелистские организации are creating internal con- flicts to Afghan communities in the 1980s when large numbers of orphaned and sin- gle-parent families were being transported on Saudi 'charity' in the border refugee camps of Pakistan. As with Afghan, rural Kosova's dependency on the 'generosity' of others, have become vulnerable to 'foreign' doctrines and practices.

Notes
1. According to the latest data produced by the international community, Kosova's rural population is the poorest in Europe, after Moldova and Tajikistan. Unemployment throughout the country is around 80 per cent, and upwards of 25 per cent of the population lives in abject poverty. See ICG; A Kosovo Road Map: Final Status (www.crsweb.org).
2. Courtesy of the Official Saudi information website for news on activities of various Saudi 'charities' in Kosovo (www.saudinf.com).

References