



**SAR Consultancy and Media Pulse**  
**Exploring the value of open source data on**  
**Terrorism Activity in BiH**



**Oct 2015**

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SAR Consultancy is delighted to present its first joint piece with Media Pulse, demonstrating the added value of media reports. For those of you who like keeping abreast of the daily news, Media Pulse already meets your needs. Now with this partnership, the added value from daily reports will be evidenced to you, enabling you to meet or extend your analytical needs. This partnership will provide organisations who want a deeper insight into the ongoing security situation in Bosnia Herzegovina (BiH) and the region, but are not privy to national intelligence. This initial piece focuses on suspected terrorists in or from BiH and provides insight into the links between certain individuals and locations. This information will help you to visualise and understand the possible active networks in certain locations. While it is acknowledged that these findings are largely based on media reports, and not on conviction data or national intelligence data, similar analysis has been shown to help identify possible future linkages, relationships, and likely perpetrators. This piece is not exhaustive, and like any good analysis will be kept up to date, as the networks expand and new data comes to light.

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## **Introduction**

Islamic State (IS) have made many countries look inwards in an attempt to assess possible risk within their own country. No country in the world is immune to such risks, but some are considered to have greater risks than others. BiH is no different. Unfortunately, it is not unaccustomed to allegations of links to global terrorist groups and the presence of active radical Islamists within their population, but what are the risks and can they be assessed or at least investigated by those not privy to national intelligence data? Could this alternative analysis provide valuable insight for security assessments, and or add to what is already known from a national intelligence perspective? This joint piece of analysis by SAR Consultancy and Media Pulse will illustrate that with proper analysis of the daily media, in conjunction with a critical mind, one can garner a useful insight into possible threats and risks worth monitoring. This may change the way you read the daily news.

## **Methodology**

SAR Consultancy was provided with access to Media Pulse's extensive media collection repository to conduct a qualitative media content analysis. The period of articles under review was the first six months of 2015. All articles that referenced the following terms were included in the review: Radicalisation, Islamic State and Foreign Fighters. Note: This analysis, albeit thorough, is based only on media reported articles. Therefore, while presenting valuable insights into perspectives on radicalisation in BiH and those potentially linked to it, the reports should not be used as categorical evidence of involvement in such activities.

## Terrorism in Bosnia Herzegovina

Recent media claims have suggested that IS have established a stronghold in BiH. BiH is not unaccustomed to such claims. The presence of mujahedeen during the war in the 90s is widely accepted. In fact, it has been heavily argued that the environment established during the war is now providing the infrastructural



base to support radical Islamist allies. Notwithstanding that BiH has a presence of radical Islamists, something not denied by the security forces, there has been little evidence that this problem is any more prolific than in other countries. Going by reports from these security forces, they may argue that it is not; in March, they were reported as saying that there was 12 terrorist cells under surveillance throughout BiH. However, other claims suggest that BiH-linked extremists are facilitating and organising much of the traffic of fighters from Europe to Syria. Media reports suggest that a large number of radical Islamists are coming through BiH for training prior to travelling to Syria or Iraq. Some of these individuals, of which it was claimed there are at least 100, were said to have been under surveillance in places like Zenica, Travnik, Breza, Bugojno, Tuzla and Kakanj. However, there is no significant evidence to support such claims revealed within the dataset under review, albeit there were reports of five suspected extremists from Kuwait, four from Saudi Arabia and four from Australia found in BiH, over recent months. Therefore, are these articles written as headline grabbing pieces or are their claims worth further investigation? This analysis will do just that using the last six months of daily media reporting. In addition, it will aim to identify if the current situation relating to the presence of radical Islamists in BiH posing a risk to BiH and or to Europe.

### Location & Geographical Analysis

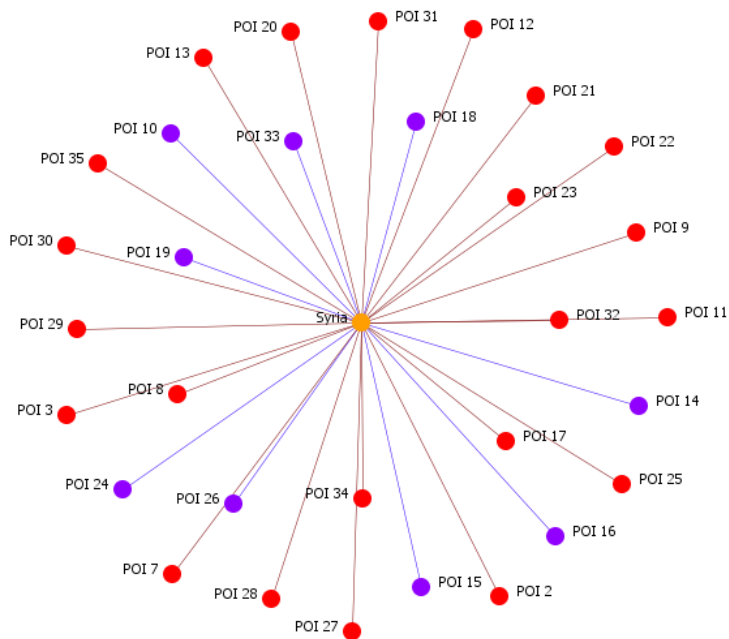
A recent UK article referenced Ošve village as an IS stronghold in BiH and Europe.<sup>1</sup> This village, near Maglaj, is becoming increasingly synonymous with claims of a presence of radical Islamists, more specifically a residential and training location for future and past fighters in Syria and Iraq with IS. The article noted that at least 12 fighters trained in Ošve, before they went to Syria, where five of them reportedly died. This piece of research also found links between Ošve and suspected BiH radical Islamists and with Syria and Iraq. Eight suspected radical Islamists were linked with Ošve in the last six months, of these, six could be linked to Syria. Of those who have reportedly gone to Syria and Iraq, two have reportedly been killed there. Interestingly, at least one of these, although not living in BiH,

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<sup>1</sup> UK Daily Mirror, 18 July 2015, ISIS set up stronghold in the heart of Europe as terrorists secretly buy land near an isolated village.

he has reportedly bought land in Ošve. Two further individuals currently fighting in Syria, are also reported to have bought land in the village. Another individual arrested by BiH's SIPA (State Investigation and Protection Agency) is also said to have property in the village and some have claimed that he leads the Wahhabi group there. The image above illustrates suspected relationships between individuals, Syria and Ošve.

The links between BiH and Syria are undeniable, albeit exact numbers are difficult to access. Media reports suggest that between 150 and 350 individuals have left BiH to go to fight in Syria and or Iraq, many of who have reportedly returned. When one plots this data, one can see many of the names of people emerge who reportedly have travelled to Syria. Thirty one of those identified within the data could be directly or indirectly linked to Syria. Of these, twenty two have been reported as having visited or were still in Syria. Of these, three had reportedly died there. The others had indirect links.



When one looks at these thirty one closer, direct and indirect links, and potential links between many of others within the group are identifiable. Interestingly none of the articles under review identified women or children who may be linked to these groups or those who are suspected of leaving BiH to travel to Syria or Iraq.

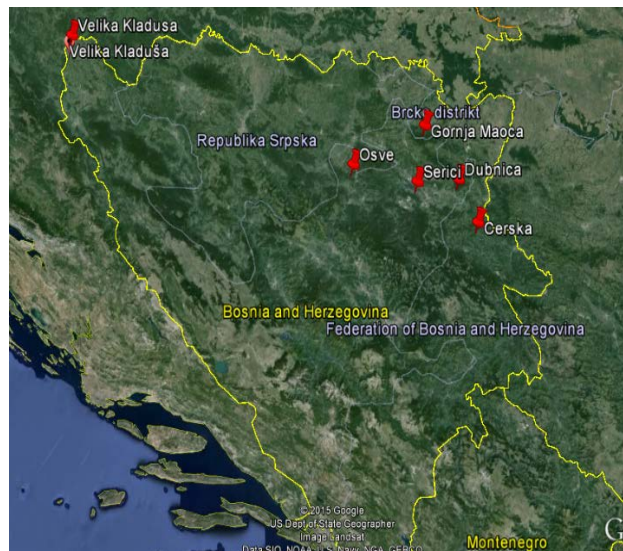
### **Suspected Extremist Islamist Enclaves**

Another interesting element that was disclosed from the data relates to the possible location of reported safe havens, training camps and enclaves of extremist Islamists. Such locations included Velika Kladuša, Gornja Maoča, Cerska, Dubnica, Šerići, and Ošve. A number of articles reportedly claimed that security forces checked out a number of allegations, but little evidence of training camps were found. This raises the question, does the presence of IS state sympathisers, former fighters and radical extremists equate to enough evidence of a training camp? This is difficult to answer, made further complicated by the remoteness of many of these locations. However, what can be seen from these locations, regardless of what is going on in them, they would appear to be serving as locations to bring together individuals with suspected extremist's ideologies. When one plots the data, many individuals can be directly or indirectly linked to these locations. For example over the last six months, six people could be individually linked to Velika Kladuša, six could be linked to Gornja Maoča, five could be linked to Dubnica, three to Cerska, two to Šerići and eight to Ošve. When these were plotted, it was interesting to see a significant overlap between many of these individuals and locations. Interestingly, only one of these locations was named in conjunction with articles about IS/Al Qaeda. For further information, please contact SAR Consultancy @ [info@sarconint.com](mailto:info@sarconint.com) or [www.sarconint.com](http://www.sarconint.com) or follow on twitter @ SAR\_Consultancy. Copyright ©SAR Consultancy 2015. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited without written permission from SAR. SAR Consultancy is an Irish registered trading name.

flags flying in remote locations throughout BiH. Paska (Tuzla), between Husino and Šićki Brod (Tuzla), and Duboki (Prijeedor) were also named in this regard. Other locations identified in the report noted the presence of suspected cell members in Sarajevo, Konjic, Zavidovici, Zenica, Tesanj, Travnik and Novi Travnik.

### **Suspected Actors and geographically significant links**

Having analysed the last six months of data, over 100 names of suspected radical Islamists emerged, the majority of whom had held or currently hold BiH nationality. Reports of links between BiH and Europe, America and Australia claim to illustrate the far reaching scope of these individuals. That being said, in itself this does not provide evidence of specific networks at play. Nonetheless, the data did identify some interesting links that are worth examining further. Fourteen individuals within the data, all with BiH nationality, were arrested outside of BiH; three in Australia, six in the USA, three in Austria and two in Germany. In



Australia, two of the three arrested had indirect links to BiH via the third man arrested, who is reported to have bought land in Ošve. The six in the USA were arrested under the same operation. All were arrested on suspicion of sending money and military equipment to ISIL and Al-Qaeda soldiers in Syria and Iraq. Five of those arrested had indirect links to BiH via one of the others within the group. This man was not linked in name to anyone in BiH but was said to have links to which he went through to get to another in Syria, and to whom funds were reportedly sent. This man had reported links to Zenica and Teslic, as well as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The three arrested in Austria were arrested in the same operation in Graz, Austria. One of which was identified as having close links to BiH and was reported to be the leader of Wahhabis in Austria, suspected of recruiting potential fighters for the terrorist organisation Jabhat al-Nusra and IS. This man was said to hold BiH nationality alongside Austrian, while others said he held Serbian and Austrian. This man was Omerovic was said to have visited Dubnica, Velika Kladuša and Gornja Maoča and was said to have direct links to another key person of interest. Interestingly, two other BiH nationals were linked to Austria by residence, but not arrest. One was said to have direct links to BiH, with a reported recent presence in Gornja Maoča. There did not appear to be evidence that the two arrested in Germany, albeit BiH nationals, brothers and allegedly members of the Islamic Centre of the Muslim Community of BiH in Stuttgart, had direct links to BiH. However, one of the brothers had reportedly fought in Syria. Another BiH national, not arrested but having had former residential links to Germany was identified within the data. He was said to be from Velika Kladuša, but no further direct links to BiH were highlighted. This man was said to have lost his life whilst fighting in Syria.

While these examples illustrate that not all BiH nationals arrested on suspicion of being or supporting radical Islamism outside of BiH, have direct links to BiH, the data indicates that the majority have direct

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links to someone who does. Such links were said to include claims of financial support to IS -affiliated groups and individuals in BiH, support for recruiting fighters to send to the caliphate, purchasing of land, and/or regular visits to BiH. These links may illustrate possible threats to BiH and to Europe. These links could be worth further investigation. Possible direct and indirect links between other suspected extremist Islamists and those arrested outside of BiH may illustrate greater networks than being seen here, as may their direct and indirect links to locations. When one visualises this data, it shows possible indirect links and potential direct links between individuals and groups, not easily identifiable when reading these articles.

### **Zvornik Incident Analysis**

In April this year, a policeman was killed, and two injured in an incident at a police station in Zvornik. Nerdin Ibric, from Sapna village, was said to be the perpetrator. It was alleged that Ibric, who was later shot by police at the scene, shouted 'Allah Akbar' before the attack. Media reports claimed that Ibric's behaviour had been unusual over the previous few months. It was alleged he had become a member of the Wahhabi community. After the incident, two key figures were arrested in conjunction with the case, one of which was said to have been a returnee fighter from Syria and was said to have influenced Ibric to conduct the attack. It was claimed that Ibric had extensive contact with this man prior to the incident. This man could be directly or indirectly linked to at least twenty of the individuals under review, both in BiH and Syria. Another interesting dimension that comes from reports after the incident, it is apparent that social network forums may also provide insight to security forces to identify potential sympathisers to the cause. For example, an individual was reportedly questioned for comments he was thought to have made on Facebook in support of Nerdin Ibric after the incident in Zvornik. That being said, with the data used in this piece, he could not be linked to any wider extremist group or individuals. However, when examined in conjunction with broader data, possible links may become evident in this case or others.

### **The case of Husein Bilal Bosnic**

A large percentage of the articles over the last six months reference the ongoing court case involving Husein Bilal Bosnic. Bosnic has been charged with criminal offenses of public incitement to terrorist activities, recruitment for terrorist activities and organising a terrorist group. The indictment alleges that Bosnic, from the position of religious authority in the so-called Salafi community outside the official institutions of the Islamic Community in BiH, publicly called for terrorism. Interestingly, when one looks through the data, direct and indirect links emerge between Bosnic and seventeen of the group. This type of analysis clearly illustrates the importance of network analysis when one is investigating possible and likely links between suspected radical Islamists.

#### **Media Pulse**

Media Pulse's Monitoring Team carry out the around-the-clock operation of media monitoring on a daily basis, 365 days a year. The team monitoring Electronic and Print Media. Seven major local TV news broadcasts, three regional TV news broadcasts, three radio news broadcasts, twelve TV current affairs programs and political talk shows, all daily newspapers and weekly magazines published in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as major daily newspapers published in Croatia and Serbia are monitored. They also monitor all major internet portals as well as international press reports related to Bosnia-Herzegovina and the region.

### **Islamic States reference to BiH and the Balkans**

In June, the Islamic State (IS) released a propaganda video entitled 'Honor is in Jihad – Message to the Balkans', however, it is likely that the video was filmed last year, given that a number of individuals in the video are reportedly dead. The movie calls for violence in the Balkans and does so via a number of individuals from the Balkans but now reportedly in Syria/Iraq. The names of those in the video were published. Interestingly, these six individuals have not been mentioned within any of the data reviewed over the last six months. When one does a quick online search of these individuals, beyond the scope of the last six months, a number of interesting linkages or possible connections emerge. For example, one of the keys individuals identified in the data, reportedly went to Syria with his wife, when one of those identified in the video went with his. One groups or front in Syria was identified in the data, which appeared to connect many of the BiH fighters who travelled to Syria and Iraq over recent years. This analysis illustrates the importance of early monitoring and of maintaining up to date and detailed network analysis, if one is attempting to forecast future relationships and threats.

### **Conclusion**

It is evident from the data presented above, that the media content analysis can provide some in depth insights into potential connections between individuals, locations, ideologies, etc. Although this analysis was only based on six months of data, the results provide a number of insights that are worth further investigation. The data has shown that through network analysis one can see wider connections, both direct and indirect, and potential avenues for further connectivity across people and places. This is very important when one is trying to forecast further activities and further links. For example, while it is evident that BiH nationals arrested on suspicion of involvement in terrorism outside of BiH are not always directly linked to cells with BiH, it is clear that some key figures maintain these connections. While this in no way confirms the claims that BiH is the stronghold of IS in Europe, it does illustrate a level of connectivity between BiH and a wider geographical network that may be worth monitoring and or investigating further. This analysis is not solely about illustrating known linkages, which are important to know and understand, more importantly, it is about attempting to identify future links in order to try to assess likely threats and risks into the future. This new partnership between SAR and Media Pulse will do just that by attempting to exploit the value of media content and give you answers to burning questions, or better still to highlight potential threats and risks for the future.

#### **What does SAR Consultancy Offer?**

SAR Consultancy offers Security and Analytical packages for a broad range of users. 'Off the shelf packages' are available, as are bespoke products. Sheelagh Brady of SAR authored the report 'Organised Crime in BiH – a silent war fought by an ambush of toothless tigers, or a war not yet fought?' (available at [www.sarconint.com](http://www.sarconint.com)) SAR is active in Nigeria, Libya and the Balkans, working with Governments, NGOs, Companies, Think Tanks, Researchers, etc.

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*Is there a topic you would like analysed that may help you access a different perspective? If so, please contact SAR or Media Pulse to discuss your needs.*

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