

PRILOZI

SETH J. FRANTZMAN, Phd. Student
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

JOVAN ČULIBRK, jeromonah
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

55.087.2(=1:497.6)(5-11)"1948" ; 355.48(5-11)"1948" ;
28-768(5-11)"1948"

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: THE BOSNIANS AND YUGOSLAV VOLUNTEERS IN THE 1948 WAR IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE

ABSTRACT: This study examines the role of the Bosnian and other Yugoslav volunteers who fought on the Arab side in the Palestine war, Israel's War of Independence, in 1948. Previous studies have only mentioned these volunteers in passing but through the use of intelligence reports, archival sources and recently published interviews with surviving participants this article reconstructs their role in the war. The case of the Bosnian participation in the 1948 war is of consequence today because of the frequent use of globalized Islamic imagery to promote the interconnectedness of conflicts throughout the world to Muslim communities and encourage recruitment of Muslims for 'Jihad' in an international context. The role of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al Husayni, in recruiting local Bosnians to fight in Palestine is an early example of this tendency in modern times.

*Let love burn in our hearts And with a song let's enter battle
To liberate our beloved homeland For which anyone would
gladly sacrifice his life.*

*Ljubav naša nek u srcu plamti, i sa pjesmom podjimo u boj.
Za slobodu mile domovine svaki rado dat će život svoj.*

– Bosnian S. S. Division song

Introduction

Scholarship in the last twenty years has shed light on numerous aspects of the 1948 war, Israel's war of independence. Benny Morris has examined the origin of the Palestinian refugees, Avi Shlaim has brought to light Zionist-Jordanian relations, Ilan Pappé has claimed there was 'ethnic-cleansing' during the war, Laila Parsons has examined the Druze during the war. However, even with military histories by Chaim Herzog, David Tal, Yoav Gelber, Alon Kadish and Avraham Sela, many narratives of the 1948 remain orphans. These include studi-

es of the first five months of the conflict and examinations of the role of foreign volunteers. Among the foreign volunteers who arrived during the initial civil war in Palestine were a number of Bosnian volunteers.

These volunteers numbered in the hundreds and there may have been as many as a thousand of them who were recruited in Displaced Persons (D. P) camps in Italy to serve alongside the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) which was formed in Damascus in December of 1947. They were former Bosnian-Muslim members of the two S. S divisions which was recruited with the help of Hajj Amin al Husayni. After the Second World War they were interned in POW and then D. P. camps in Italy, unable to return to Tito's Yugoslavia for fear of prosecution, a number of them decided to go to Palestine to fight in what they saw was a Muslim cause.

This article is based on primary sources, archival material, period newspaper reports and interview transcripts of participants. To our knowledge no other scholar has ever examined this aspect of the 1948 war and the story of the hundreds of Bosnian volunteers who appear in many texts on the 1948 war has never been examined. Our article concludes that the volunteers were partly opportunistic but they were also motivated by an early sense of defending fellow Muslims. Most interestingly their efforts would be repaid in 1994 when Muslims from the Middle East and elsewhere journeyed to Bosnia to aid the Bosnian army in its secession from Yugoslavia. The descendants of some of these volunteers have settled in Lebanon and Syria and they join a history of Bosnian settlement in the Middle East that goes back to 1878 and to some extent even further in history.

The Long Shadow of Hajj Amin

In October of 1937 Hajj Amin al Husayni, Mufti of Jerusalem and leader of the Arab Higher Committee was hiding in the Haram al Sharif, the Holy sanctuary atop the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. In July of that year the British had first considered arresting him for instigating the Arab revolt against the British Mandate in Palestine. However he was allowed to travel freely to a Pan-Arab conference in Bludan in July of 1927. The killing of Lewis Andrews, the acting district commissioner of the Galilee on September 26th outside a church in Nazareth enraged the British and it became clear that the Mufti would eventually be forced from hiding. He took sanctuary in the Haram al Sharif on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem on October 1st 1937 (following British arrests of members of the Arab High Committee) and on October 13th, disguised as a Bedouin, he fled to Lebanon via Jaffa.¹

In Lebanon he received sanctuary from the French mandatory authorities, but his contacts with Italian agents and the declaration of war on Germany by Britain and France on September 3rd, 1939 forced him to flee again. This time he made his way to Baghdad disguised as a woman, on October 13th, 1939.² In Baghdad in 1940 and 1941 Hajj Amin increased his contacts with Germany, offering to aid the Nazis in return for their help in gaining independence for the Arab sta-

We would like to thank the Haganah archives for their assistance in this research project

¹ Zvi Elpeleg, *The Grand Mufti: Hajj Amin al-Hussaini*, Portland; Frank Cass, 1993, pp. 48–49.

² Elpeleg, p. 56.

tes. The Rashid Ali coup of April 1st, 1941, Hajj Amin's declaration of a 'Jihad' against England, and his subsequent flight to Iran in June of 1941 took him farther from Palestine. From Iran the Italians helped him enter Turkey, and then he made his way to Rome on October 11th. He met with Mussolini and then with Hitler on the 28th of November.³ Hajj Amin schemed with the Italians and Nazis over how he could be of help to their cause and how they might aid him.⁴ After the failure of various schemes to create an Arab military unit from, in one instance from 400⁵ captured Arab POWs that had served with the British in Greece, he eventually settled for recruiting Muslim volunteers in the Balkans, in Bosnia and eventually in Kosovo.

The 13th S. S. Handzar Division, Hajj Amin and the Bosnian Muslims

This was not the first time Hajj Amin had taken an interest in involving non-Palestinian Arab Muslims in his conflict with the Zionists in Palestine. In 1931 he had founded the World Islamic Congress and served as its President. He would continue his activities with these pan-Muslim organizations and other pan-Arab organizations until his death. In this context his involvement with the Bosnian Muslims and his championing of their cause was not so extraordinary.

In speaking to potential recruits Hajj Amin al Husayni stressed the connections they had to the Muslim nation fighting the British throughout the world: „The hearts of all Muslims must today go out to our Islamic brothers in Bosnia, who are forced to endure a tragic fate. They are being persecuted by the Serbian and communist bandits, who receive support from England and the Soviet Union... They are being murdered, their possessions are robbed, and their villages are burned. England and its allies bear a great accountability before history for mishandling and murdering Europe's Muslims, just as they have done in the Arabic lands and in India.“⁶

Three divisions of Muslim soldiers were recruited. The Waffen S. S. 13th Handžar ('Knife') and the 23rd Kama ('Dagger') were formally 'Croatian' units, and the 21st Skenderbeg.⁷ The Skenderbeg was an Albanian unit of around 4,000 men and the Kama was composed of Muslims from Bosnia, containing 3,793 men at its peak.⁸ The Handžar division was the largest unit, composed of around 20,000 Bosnian Muslim volunteers.⁹ According to the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*,

³ Elpeleg, p. 66.

⁴ Elpeleg, pp. 68–69. He broadcast propaganda, offered to help in North Africa, and even helped create a Arab paratrooper unit whose members were dropped into Palestine in 1944.

⁵ Around 130 eventually joined the Handžar unit.

⁶ <http://www.srpska-mreza.com/bookstore/handschar/handschar.htm> as retrieved on 5 Aug 2007 03:47:58 GMT.

⁷ Handžar is sometimes written Hanjar or Handschar.

⁸ At the time today's Bosnia was administered by Croatia which was an ally of Germany, while much of modern Serbia was administered by Germany following the invasion of Yugoslavia by Germany in 1941. Christopher Ailsby, *Hitler's Renegades: Foreign Nationals in the Service of the Third Reich (Photographic Histories)*, Potomac Books Inc, New Ed edition, 2004, p. 162.

⁹ George Lepre, *Himmler's Bosnian Division. The Waffen-SS Handschar Division 1943–1945*, Schiffer Military History, Schiffer, 2000.

„These Muslim volunteer units, called Hanjar[sic], were put in Waffen-SS units, fought Yugoslav partisans in Bosnia, and carried out police and security duties in Hungary. They participated in the massacre of civilians in Bosnia and volunteered to join in the hunt for Jews in Croatia.“¹⁰ Part of the division also escorted Hungarian Jews from the forced labor in mine in Bor on their way back to Hungary.

The division was also employed against Serbs, who as Orthodox Christians were seen by the Bosnian Muslims as enemies. When the war came to a close the Handžar division surrendered to the British army on May 8th, 1945. Large numbers of Bosnian Muslim P. O.Ws were moved by the British army from Villach, Udine and Padua to Rimini near Taranto in Italy. According to one of the members of the unit there were as many as 70,000 P. O.Ws, including Bosnians and others, at the camp.¹¹ Hajj Amin’s fate was different. He tried to enter Switzerland on May 4th but was eventually apprehended and shipped to Paris by the French. After escaping from his lax French guards he arrived in Egypt on the 28th of May 1946 via Rome and Athens. He would remain in Egypt, struggling to reconstitute the Palestinian Arab National movement under an organization entitled the Arab Executive Committee (also known as the Arab Higher Executive), an organization rebuilt with the acquiescence of the British and chaired by Hajj Amin’s relative, Jimal Husayni.¹² There is no evidence that he would ever come in contact with his former Bosnian recruits during the course of the 1948 war in Palestine, however it is clear that his influence on the unit must have been significant.¹³

Meanwhile the former members of the Handžar division began to be transformed from P. O.W camps to D. P. or displaced persons camps in Italy. This was brought due to the creation of Marshall Tito’s Yugoslavia at the end of the Second World War. Since the former Bosnian Muslim volunteers in the German S. S. units could not return home for fear of prosecution or internment, they remained in Italy as a people without a country. George Lepre, who is the most knowledgeable scholar on the history of the 13th S. S Handžar and author of *Himmler’s Bosnian Division: The Waffen-SS Handschar Division 1943–1945* describes their fate as; „those Bosnians who elected to remain in the camps eventually found asylum in countries throughout the Western and Arab worlds. Many of those who settled in the Middle East later fought in Palestine against the new Israeli state.“¹⁴ But first they had to get to the Middle East.

The formation of the Bosnian unit in 1947

The Bosnian Muslims, referred to usually as ‘Yugoslavs’ in period newspaper accounts, remained in D. P camps in Italy until 1947 when it was reported

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Edition 1990, Volume 2, page 707

¹¹ Lepre, p. 308.

¹² Elpeleg, p. 82–83.

¹³ The next time the Mufti was able to meet up with on of his recruits was when he met Husein Đozo, an imam from the Handžar division in Cairo at a Congress of Muslim leaders in Cairo in 1968, Ženi Lebl, *Hadž-Amin i Berlin* (Serbo-Croatian), Belgrade, 2003, pp. 279–281.

¹⁴ Lepre, p. 308.

on April 16th, 1947 that they would be transferred to Germany.¹⁵ The *Palestine Post* reported on April 18th that there was a „reported request from the Syrian government for the transfer of 8,000 Bosnian Moslem [sic] refugees at present in Italy. Yugoslav quarters here say that the Arab League has written to all Arab states, urging them to assist these Moslem D. P.'s, and that some financial help has already been received. Yugoslav officials say that they too want these 8,000 Moslems back, as they are the Hadjar [sic] Division of the German Wehrmacht which surrendered to the British...The Yugoslavs state that they view with the gravest concern the possibility of the transfer of this group to the Middle East.“¹⁶

The Yugoslav concern for the fate of the Bosnians had little to do with support for the creation of Israel. A subsequent article on April 20th noted that Yugoslavia supported independence for all the Arab states, including the Arabs of Palestine. Rather Yugoslavia was interested in the fact that suspected war criminals might be among the D. P.s in Italy.¹⁷

By December, 1947 a nucleus of former 13th Handžar officers had made their way to Syria and were beginning to re-constitute their unit in Damascus. Their knowledge of Arabic would have been rudimentary but their unit's imams, who presumably also were in the D. P camps would have been able to translate some Arabic to them, having learned literary Arabic through religious schooling. A report by Israel Baer in the *Palestine Post* noted that „the latest recruits to the Syrian army are members of the Bosnian Waffen S. S... Syria has offered asylum to the entire Bosnian S. S. several thousands of whom had escaped into British occupation zones in Austria and Germany... a number of Bosnian S. S with their Nazi-trained commanders are now in Syria. It is reported that they are directing a school for commando tactics for the Syrian Army.“¹⁸ No doubt the fledgling Syrian army which had been born in 1946 was in need of officers and trainers with experience. Emilio Traubner, writing on December 3rd 1947 noted that the International Refugee Organization (IRO) was even convinced to fund the travel of Bosnian Muslims from Italy to the Middle East so that they could find homes since they refused to be repatriated to Yugoslavia.¹⁹ Some of these Bosnians may have found their way as far as Iraq as settlers. A report on December 22nd noted that the Iraqi government had sent a representative to Europe to make contact with Bosnian Muslims in D. P. camps and invite as many as 2,500 to settle in Iraq.²⁰

¹⁵ 'Yugoslav D.Ps for Germany', *Palestine Post* April 16th, 1947. These could have been Jewish displaced persons however the report notes that 'about 25,000 Yugoslavs are listed as being in Italy'.

¹⁶ 'Syria wants Muslim 'Nazis', *Palestine Post*, April 18th, 1947. The *Palestine Post*, the ancestor of today's *Jerusalem Post*, was an English language newspaper published in Jerusalem by Gershon Agron since 1932. It was the newspaper of record for Mandatory Palestine and this research relies heavily on reports from the newspaper.

¹⁷ 'Hearing to be sought by Jewish Agency' April 20th, 1947. Tito's support for the Arab cause in Palestine would continue until September of 1948 when the *Palestine Post* reported that on September 3rd, 1948 „Yugoslavia Supports Israel.“

¹⁸ Israel Baer, 'Bosnian S.S in Syrian Forces,' *Palestine Post*, December 19th, 1947.

¹⁹ Emilio Traubner, 'Sarajevo to Tel Aviv' *Palestine Post*, December 3rd, 1947.

²⁰ 'Palestinian Jews Must Leave Lebanon' *Palestine Post*, December 22nd, 1947. See also 'Iraq needs immigrants,' *Palestine Post*, March 18th, 1948.

What is clear from the Syrian and Iraqi solidarity with the Bosnian Muslims was a degree of pan-Islamic solidarity with Muslims languishing in camps in Europe who had no where to go.

On January 28th, 1948 it was noted that Arab agents were working to recruit Bosnians for the fight in Palestine, which had degenerated into Civil war between Jews and Arabs following the November 29th, 1947 passage of a U. N. resolution for the partition of the country.²¹ These agents were operating on behalf of at least three causes, recruiting for local Arab irregular units in Palestine, for the Syrian regular army and for the ALA. The Syrian army in particular was interested in finding qualified veterans to fly planes and help organized their army. Some of those recruited for the Syrian army later ended up working for the ALA, which was organized in Syria.

On February 2nd it was reported that 25 Bosnian Muslims had arrived in Beirut and were moving to Damascus to join 40 other Bosnians already there.²² A report by Jon Kimche on February 4th, 1948 further noted that up to 3,500 were being transferred to Syria to fight alongside Fauzi Kaukji's (Fawzi Qawukji) Arab Liberation Army (ALA) in its invasion of Palestine.²³ The numbers were most likely an exaggeration. On March 14th a party of 67 Albanians, 20 Yugoslavs, and 21 Croats led by an Albanian named Derwish Bashaco arrived by boat in Beirut from Italy. A Haganah report mentions that there was a German officer among them.²⁴ They were hosted by the Palestine Arab Bureau and made their way to Damascus to join the ALA.²⁵ By this time the points of embarkation for these volunteers were also being used to ship weapons for the fight in Palestine. One ship, the S. S. Lino, full of weapons destined for Beirut was seized and sunk by the Haganah on April 4th, 1948.²⁶ However in the first week of April another two hundred Bosnians arrived in Beirut aboard the boat S. S. Augustina.²⁷

A lengthy report by Claire Neikind, a reporter for the *Palestine Post* on March 2nd described the procedure by which Arab agents were recruiting volunteers among the D. Ps in Italy. Men between 22 and 32 were sought and in return they would receive free passage to Beirut and their families would receive maintenance. If they were Muslims, as in the case of the Bosnians, they were invited to settle and the International Refugee Organization would gladly accept Arab governments taking the D. P.s off its hands. Some individuals were leaving the D. P. camps without permission and sailing anyway. According to Neikind 300 men had already arrived and 90 Croatian Ustaše were also making their way.²⁸

²¹ J. Rosenthal, 'Vatican and Jerusalem,' *Palestine Post*, January 28th, 1948.

²² It also noted that Tito had requested their extradition. Sam Souki, 'Ustachis join Arabs,' *Palestine Post*, February 2nd, 1948.

²³ Jon Kimche, *Palestine Post*, 'Anti-Zionism in Eastern Europe,' February 4th, 1948.

²⁴ Haganah report, March 14th, 1948, „Recruitment“, 105/37/85, Haganah Archives.

²⁵ 'Mixed Guerillas', *Palestine Post*, March 14th, 1948.

²⁶ 'Arms for Beirut Seized by Italians,' *Palestine Post*, April 5th, 1948.

²⁷ 'Nazi fighting forces to support Arabs,' *Palestine Post*, April 9th, 1948.

²⁸ Ante Pavelić's Ustaše were a political movement allied with Nazism between 1941 and 1945. It was known to have committed atrocities and ethnic-cleansing against minorities in Croatia, especially Serbs and Jews. The Ustaše state was enlarged by the Axis powers and included modern

However by this time the IRO had gotten wise to the fact that these men were making their way as mercenaries to engage in fighting and some were being denied leave from the camps. However in the case of Albanians and Bosnians, who were Muslims, the IRO had agreed to release them and Neikind mentioned one group of 135 men who were on their way to Egypt. Fifty-seven were sent to Amman. Between Dec. 1st and Feb. 20th a total of 106 were sent to Syria. Neikind noted that „as soon as their families are settled they enter Arab military service.“²⁹

If one accepts merely the low totals from newspaper accounts it appears that there were at least 520 Bosnians³⁰, 67 Albanians and 111 Croats in Syria or Beirut as well as 135 Bosnians on their way to Egypt and fifty-seven Bosnians in Jordan. There were at least 890 volunteers from Yugoslavia and Albania in the Middle East by April of 1948, before Israel's declaration of Independence on May, 15th, 1948.

Upon arrival the volunteers in Damascus found their way to a camp at Katana (Qatana), a Syrian military base south-west of Damascus that the Syrian army had provided for use by the Arab Liberation Army being assembled to invade Palestine.³¹ Here they met their commander, Fauzi Kaukji (Qawuqji) for the first time. Kaukji was fifty-eight years old, a former Syrian officer in the Ottoman army he had led Arab irregulars fighting the British in Palestine between July and October 1936 and 1939 and had now been chosen by the Arab League's general Ismail Safwat to lead the invasion of Palestine. The ALA before June of 1948 was split into a variety of commands, one under Kaukji in Samaria and others under Abid Shishakly in the Galilee and Sheikh Wahab, a Druze sheikh, in Shafa'amr. There was also an Egyptian unit in the south attached, at least on paper, to the ALA. In June of 1948 Kaukji would be given command over the entire ALA. The Bosnian and other volunteers were trained in Syria and formed into three Battalions of the ALA; the 1st Yarmuk, 2nd Yarmuk and the Hittin. Later a fourth force, the Ajnaddin battalion would be added to this.³² The Bosnians served primarily in the Ajnaddin battalion. Between November 1947 and April 1948 the Haganah (the Jewish underground in Palestine) intelligence estimated as many as 4,000 volunteers had joined Kaukji's army and entered Palestine.³³

The Bosnians who found themselves in Jordan may have joined with Iraqi volunteers who were also affiliated with the ALA. However Haganah intelli-

day Bosnia and some 700,000 Bosnian Muslims, among whom the 13th Handžar and Kama were recruited. After the war senior Ustaše became wanted criminals in Yugoslavia and many fled abroad.

²⁹ Claire Neikind, 'Arabs need Balkan soldiers,' *Palestine Post*, March 2nd, 1948.

³⁰ This is based on Claire Neikind's report on March 2nd and adding the 20 reported on March 14th and the 200 reported in April aboard the Augustina. If one instead adds together all of the Bosnians mentioned the total is 691.

³¹ For information see David Tal, *War in Palestine 1948*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 73.

³² For information see David Tal, *War in Palestine 1948*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 20.

³³ Intelligence report: 'The Infiltration of Foreign Combatants into Palestine', 15 April - 1948, IDF archives, 661/69/36 (Hebrew). The battalions were divided into 30 man platoons and they were armed with rifles as well as one Bren machine-gun and two 60 mm mortars per platoon. This was probably an idealized version of the force which generally was not well led, was disorganized and fought more as guerillas than a regular unit.

gence discovered that this unit had returned to Baghdad in April of 1948.³⁴ It is more probable the Bosnians joined the 'Army of Salvation' that had been recruited in Palestine by Hajj Amin's cousin, Abdul Khader Husayni. This was not a coincidence, the Mufti had encouraged the recruitment of these men five long years before by haranguing them about the need to defend the Islamic nation or *umma* against the British empire. Now they were fighting what they might have seen as an extension of that empire, the Zionists in Palestine. In addition one unit within the Army of Salvation was led by Hassan Salameh, who had been trained in Germany during the war as a paratrooper and he may have been acquainted with the Bosnians in the Handžar division while in Europe. This theory is partially confirmed by an interview in Beirut conducted in December of 2005 by Hassan Haidar Diab. Diab was able to locate Kemal Rustemović a Bosnian who had served with the volunteers. He claimed to have been a member of the Arab Salvation Army where 150 of his fellow Bosnians served under a Bosnian officer named Fuad Šefkobegović.³⁵

It is not known what became of the Bosnians in Egypt, they may have met the Mufti there, since he was in Cairo at the time, and may have also found their way to Palestine to serve alongside his cousin. There is a very unlikely scenario whereby they might have joined a contingent of Muslim Brothers who invaded Palestine in April of 1948. This unit was commanded by Tarik el Afriqi, A Sudanese Muslim who was close to Husayni.³⁶ By the end of April almost 1,000 Bosnian, Croatian, and Albanian volunteers may have been in Palestine as members of three different armed units.

The Role of the Bosnians in the 1948 War

Between November 29th, 1947 and May 15th, 1948 a civil war was fought in Palestine between Arab irregular units and the Jewish underground or Haganah. During this period the British, who were nominally in charge, mostly stayed out of the fighting. After May 15th and the declaration of the State of Israel five Arab armies, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq, invaded the country.

The Bosnian volunteers in the Arab forces that marched into Palestine in 1948 were not the first Bosnians to have arrived in the Holy Land. In the 18th century Ahmad Djassir Pasha, governor of Acre, had been a Bosnian Muslim. In 1878, after Bosnia was incorporated into Austria a number of Bosnians were re-settled by the Ottomans in Palestine, at Caesarea among other places.

Walid Khalidi has written that by February of 1948 there were only 34 Bosnians in Palestine as part of the ALA.³⁷ As we have shown here this is almost

³⁴ Intelligence Report, 8 April 1948, Haganah Archives, 105/216/2.

³⁵ Hassan Haider Diab, 'Ustaše i Titovi borci zajedno ratovali protiv Izraela!', *Večernji list*, 23.XII.2005.

³⁶ See Netanel Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword: Israel's war of independence 1947-1949*, Jerusalem: Massada Press, 1961, p. 81.

³⁷ Walid Khalidi, 'The military situation in Palestine on the eve of Plan Dalet', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Spring, 1998), p. 63.

certainly incorrect. According to General Ismail Safwat who was the general officer commanding the ALA, his units totaled 5,200 men “who had completed their training at the Qatana camp.”³⁸ He indicated that he had Arab, Druze and Circassian volunteers but did not differentiate between the rest of his fighters. Perhaps he was simply not aware of the international nature of his army since he was not actively engaged in leading or training it.

Since the fall of 1947 Arab forces under Abdul Khader Husayni and other locals had harassed Jewish traffic and supplies moving from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Eventually the road was effectively closed. By this time the ALA had consolidated a position around Nablus and Jenin, after having infiltrated into Palestine from Syria through Jordan.³⁹ An artillery unit of the ALA was certainly dispatched to Nebi Samuel on April 10th and more units arrived in late April to aid in the siege of Jerusalem but there are conflicting reports that some Bosnians found themselves embroiled in the battle for Kastel (Qastel) between the 3rd and 8th of April, 1948. The Bosnian unit included at most 120 men from the ALA.⁴⁰ This battle was a precursor to the Haganah’s Operation Nachshon which was intended to relieve the siege of Jerusalem. It is not clear what became of the Bosnians who fought at Kastel, it may have been the same unit that was at Jaffa a month later. Most likely they were a few Bosnians who had joined Abdul Khader Husayni’s ‘Mujahadin’.⁴¹ Some of these men may have retired to Ramallah, north of Jerusalem, where it was reported on April 16th that foreigners had taken over the best hotels and „molested“ the local population. Iraqis, Syrians, Poles and “Yugoslavs“ were among those mentioned.⁴²

The next battle that the Bosnian units participated in was at Jaffa between April 25th and May 5th. Jaffa had been allotted to the Arab state in the U. N partition plan, but it was surrounded by territory allotted to the Jewish state. The battle began when the Jewish underground group, the Irgun, launched an attack on the city. According to the Haganah there were 400 “Yugoslavs“ and 200 Iraqis defending Jaffa.⁴³ According to Khalidi the garrison of Jaffa consisted of 350 ALA men and 250 local Arabs.⁴⁴ On the 28th of April Michel Issa, commander of the Ajnadin Battalion, received orders from Fauzi Kaukji to move from the Jerusalem foothills to relieve the siege of Jaffa. At the time he was based at the villages of Biddu and Nabi Samweel with a unit of the Hittin battalion. He took all 250 men with him. The Ajnadin Battalion was made up of local Arabs most of whom had for-

³⁸ „A brief report on the situation in Palestine and comparison between the forces and potential of both sides,“ by General Ismail Safwat. The report was sent to the Arab League military committee on March 23rd, 1948 from the Arab Liberation Army headquarters in Damascus. Translated by Khalidi, in Khalidi, ‘Fall of Kastel’ p. 64.

³⁹ General Sir Al. Cunningham to Secretary of State for the Colonies: Weekly Intelligence Appreciation, 13 March 1948, Public Record Office, London, CO 537/3869. See also Tal p. 37.

⁴⁰ Khalidi, ‘Fall of Kastel’ p. 72.

⁴¹ Hanoach Bartov, *Dado, 48 Years and 20 Days: The Full Story of the Yom Kippur War and of the Man Who Led Israel’s Army*, Jerusalem: Ma’ariv Book Guild, 1981, p. 35.

⁴² No title, *Palestine Post*, April 16th, 1948.

⁴³ Intelligence Reports, 2 and 7 April 1948, Haganah Archives 105/98.

⁴⁴ Khalidi, ‘Fall of Jaffa,’ p. 103.

merly been members of the Trans-Jordanian Frontier Force (T. J.F. F). Issa arrived in Jaffa on April 29th at 6am. At the time Jaffa was commanded by Major Adil Najmuddin (Najm al-Din) who proceeded to refuse to hand over the city to Issa. Due to the dispute Najmuddin deserted the city on the 1st of May. According to Issa's telegram to Kaukji, „Adil left city by sea with all Iraqis and Yugoslavs.“⁴⁵

We do not know what became of these two Bosnian units that fought at Kastel and Jaffa. Kemal Rustemović recalled in his interview that he had first been at Nablus, then Jaffa and then at Jenin.⁴⁶ This would mean that members of his Battalion could have participated in both battles. How they made their way by sea from Jaffa to Jenin is not clear, but they could have easily been landed at any beach between Jaffa and Haifa, perhaps at Caesarea or Tantura. What is more likely is that Rustemović's memory was slightly in error and that in fact he had been at Nablus and then Jenin prior to going to Jaffa, from where he was transported by boat to Beirut. The ALA did not take part in the battle of Jenin after Jaffa and did not return to the Galilee until June 9th, 1948.

Between their evacuation from Jaffa and their reunion with the ALA the State of Israel was born on May 15th, 1948. On the same day Arab armies invaded Israel and the war became much wider. When units of the Iraqi army arrived around Nablus and Tulkarem and attempted to cut Israel in half by driving towards the sea, Israel launched a counterattack against Jenin from Afula. During the 3rd and 4th of June, 1948 Israeli forces moved down the Jenin-Afula road and eventually occupied the town situated high in the hills of the West Bank. If the Bosnians participated there is no account of it outside of Rustemović's.

The ALA became a disorganized and largely spent force by the time it saw fighting around Nazareth again between the 14th and 17th of July. During the fighting in the north Kaukji's army of 2,500 men was reduced to only 800 and it's Hittin battalion was driven from Nazareth and into the Northern Galilee. Rustemović was one of these men according to his interview. The *Jerusalem Post* reported that the ALA still included “Yugoslavs.”⁴⁷ On July 18th the *Post* reported that the British government's intelligence had acted to „systematically sabotage [the] Palestine partition scheme“ and provided as evidence the fact that England was aware of the presence of Bosnian volunteers in Syria.⁴⁸

Between the fall of Nazareth and the opening of the Israeli offensive known as Operation Hiram which was launched on October 29th, Kaukji's ALA was completely re-organized. Abid Shishakly and his 2nd Reserve Battalion was sent from Syria to join Kaukji, along with a reinforced Hittin Battalion. Shishakly had been in the Galilee from January to May of 1948 and had returned to Syria in August. The 'army' now had as many as 3,000 soldiers, but moral was low and

⁴⁵ 'Report to Fawzi Qawukji, Commander of the Arab Liberation Army Central Front, from Captain Michel Issa, Head of the Ajnadin Battalion, 6 May 1948 as translated in Khalidi, 'Fall of Jaffa,' p. 103.

⁴⁶ Hassan Haider Diab, 'Ustaše i Titovi borci zajedno ratovali protiv Izraela!', *Večernji list*, 23.XII.2005.

⁴⁷ 'Army Staff did not want to accept truce,' *Palestine Post*, July 22nd, 1948.

⁴⁸ 'Britain Sabotaged U. N.,' *Palestine Post*, July 18th, 1948.

training was atrocious.⁴⁹ How many of these men were Bosnians is not known but Rustemović was among them. During the fighting which lasted from October 29th to the 31st, in which the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conquered the entire Galilee and parts of Southern Lebanon, Rustemović recalled his unit being led by a Moroccan named Ibrahim Beg Sudan. He also recalled participating in a battle at a place called Maijs Al Jabar (Mis al-Jabal), where 8 Yugoslavs were killed including a Slovenian named Franc Robotnik.⁵⁰ A report on November 1st, detailing the capture of the Galilee, noted that some “Yugoslavs“ had been captured during the fighting that had driven the ALA and the Lebanese army from Palestine and actually found the Israeli army in Lebanon.⁵¹

The Bosnians and the 1948 war, strange bedfellows?

It is not known what became of the Bosnians who served with the Arab forces in the 1948 war. Rustemović, who was born in the village of Kuti in Central Bosnia in 1928 joined the Lebanese army in 1950. He served his adopted country for thirty years, married a local woman named Karima and had seven daughters and five sons with her. He was granted Lebanese citizenship, unlike the Palestine refugees who fled to Lebanon, and retired from the army in 1980. According to him none of the Bosnians who had served in the S. S. ever returned to Yugoslavia as they expected to be put on trial for their activities during WWII. Some ended up in America, Australia and Canada.⁵² It is assumed that some also settled in Syria or elsewhere in the Middle East. Today many would be in their eighties and nineties and it is doubtful that many of them survive.

The legacy of the Bosnian participation in the war was recalled by Emilio Traubner when he visited a villa on the outskirts of Jaffa in December of 1948;

„Thirty-five Bosnian Moslems, members of the ‘Arab Army of Liberation,’ were billeted in that house... Yusef Begovich, the Bosnian cook and himself from Pale near Sarajevo has left behind a careful daily record of their meals from which it appears that while on April 5th he had to cater to 35 persons, on April 20th fifteen had already gone. On the 25th only 10 meals were distributed, on the 29th only three and there the entries end... These 35 Yugoslav Moslems [sic] who had a good reason to expect to be among the first to occupy and loot Tel Aviv, are part of a group of some thousands who came to the Middle East to join the *jihād* against Israel.“⁵³

This poignant story reveals much about the nature of the Bosnian volunteers. They were men who could not return home. They had been used as anti-

⁴⁹ Tal, p.419.

⁵⁰ Hassan Haider Diab, ‘Ustaše i Titovi borci zajedno ratovali protiv Izraela!’, *Večernji list*, 23.XII.2005.

⁵¹ ‘Army of the North drives Kaukji out of country,’ *Palestine Post*, November 1st, 1948.

⁵² Hassan Haider Diab, ‘Ustaše i Titovi borci zajedno ratovali protiv Izraela!’, *Večernji list*, 23.XII.2005.

⁵³ Emilio Traubner, ‘Sarajevo to Tel Aviv’ *Palestine Post*, December 3rd, 1947. If the decrease in the number of meals served indicates the casualty rates of the unit, then it is a wonder any of them survived the fighting. Most likely they were being evacuated by sea.

partisan units in the Balkans and participated in war crimes. After the war they had rejoined the cause of the man who had originally supported recruiting them, joining in the fight for Palestine. They shed light on one of the least discussed subjects of the 1948 war, the role of foreign volunteers. Many of the fighters in Palestine even before the declaration of the State of Israel were foreigners. Iraqis, Syrians, even 53 Germans and Englishmen. Many came for different reasons. However the role of the Bosnians is unique and illustrates a greater issue.

The Mufti, Hajj Amin al Husayni, had been interested in pan-Islamic ideas. It is not a surprise that he was able to connect the cause of the Bosnians with his own. In October of 1968 he again met with Husein Đozo, the Handžar divisions former deputy imam in Cairo during a congress of Muslim clergy.⁵⁴ Many years later in the 1990s during the Balkan wars Arabs would journey to the Balkans to participate in war between Bosnians and Serbs. In a strange twist they would be re-paying the debt incurred when 900 or more Bosnians Muslims gave up their homes and past to come to the Middle East to serve the Muslim Arab cause. The involvement of these Bosnians may be seen as an early version of the linkage of Muslim conflicts throughout the world. This has gained increased exposure lately due to the involvement of foreign Muslim volunteers in the Algerian, Lebanese, Kashmiri, Sudanese and Afghani conflicts among others. The role of the Bosnians might equally be seen as an opportunistic one. They had no where else to go and the Middle East offered them a future. But then one has to ask why the Mufti's original recruitment call of joining the 'Jihad' resonated so strongly among them.

Seth J. Frantzman, Jovan Ćulibrk

ČUDNO ORTAŠTVO: BOSANSKI I JUGOSLOVENSKI DOBROVOLJCI U RATU U IZRAELU/PALESTINI 1948

Rezime

Članak ispituje ulogu bosanskih i drugih jugoslovenskih dobrovoljaca koji su se borili na arapskoj strani u Palestini tokom izraelskog rata za nezavisnost 1948. Ranije studije su pominjale ove dobrovoljce tek mimogred, ali je sada na osnovu obaveštajnih izveštaja, arhivske građe i nedavno objavljenih intervjua sa učesnicima, moguće potpunije rekonstruisati njihovu ulogu u ovom ratu. Slučaj bosanskog učešća u ratu 1948. posebno je interesantan u kontekstu savremene upotrebe globalne islamske mitologije u promovisanju međupovezanosti konflikata u svetu, a zarad ohrabriranja regrutovanja muslimana za „džihad“. Uloga jerusalimskog muftije Hadži Amina al Husenija u regrutovanju lokalnih Bosanaca za borbu u Palestini predstavlja rani primer ove savremene tendencije.

⁵⁴ Ženi Lebl, *Hadž-Amin i Berlin*, Belgrade, 2003, pp. 279–281.