RESPONDING TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

ISLAMIST

Saudi Arabia   Qatar

Motive: Promote Salafism and further political and economic interests.

EXTERNAL ACTORS

FAR-RIGHT

Russia

Motive: Promote instability to undermine the West and further economic interests.

DRIVERS

- **Perceived duty** to help Muslims abroad
- **Repay sacrifice** of mujahedeen in the Yugoslav Wars
- **Discrimination** against Islam and Salafism
- **Polarization** within Islam

Post-war resentments
Socioeconomic conditions
Disillusionment with governance
Migrant refugee crisis
Social bonds

- Disappointment with **the West** [EU, NATO, US]
- Increasing sense of **Slavic identity**
- Orthodox Christian **brotherhood**
- Spread of **progressive values**
- Fear of **Islamization** of Europe

MECHANISMS

- **Foreign funding** of Salafi mosques, schools, and community centers
- Training and financial **incentives**
- Invite-only **religious services**
- Balkan **Islamist diaspora** in Europe
- **Prisons**

Offline

- Russian and Serbian **TV/radio proxies**
- Strategic **cultural sectors** (Serbian Orthodox Church, soccer, universities)
- Yugoslav Wars' **veterans groups**
- Ethno-nationalist **politicians**

- **Propaganda** on social media
- Jihadi content accessible in **native language**
- **Private chats** among extremist diaspora groups
- **Imams'** personal media platforms

Online

- **Propaganda** on social media in native language
- Russian and Serbian **local social media proxies**
- **Private chats** among extremist diaspora groups

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS INTERVENTIONS

R eveal external actor influence and financing

A mplify and visibly support pro-democracy and pro-West movements and organizations

I mprove media literacy through school and private sector programming

S trengthen capabilities of local fact-checking institutions

E stablish inoculation messages, especially to youth, through strategic cultural sectors

P romote ethnic and religious tolerance

E ngage with value-aligned local student university organizations

A ccentuate positive socioeconomic and political changes

C ommend and encourage strong investigative journalism

E mphasize returnees' narratives of disillusionment through credible messengers

References: Barber, 1992; Bogzeanu, 2019; Braddock, 2019; Canga, 2011; Çela, 2018; Deimel, 2019; Eisentraut & de Leon, 2018; Gall, 2016; Kelly, 2019; Kelmendi & Balaj, 2017; Mejdini et al., 2017; Mietz, 2016; Metodieva, 2018, 2019; OSCE, 2020; Perry, 2019; Rrustemi, de Wijk & Dunlop, 2019; Speckhard & Shajkovci, 2018; Steurenthaler, 2017; Stronski & Himes, 2019; Shtuni 2019; van Eerten et al., 2017; Vlk, 2020; Živković, 2018

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