

BRIEFING MEMO

To: Congressional Staff - House Foreign Affairs Committee, Europe Subcommittee
From: Joel Rubin, Washington Strategy Group
Subject: 12/2/25 Hearing: *Flashpoint: A Path Toward Stability in the Western Balkans*
Date: December 1, 2025

Dear HFAC Europe Subcommittee Staffer –

I'm pleased to share with you preparatory materials for your consideration for the committee's upcoming hearing on the Western Balkans. These materials focus on the Republic of Srpska (RS), for whom I am providing consulting services and on whose behalf I am registered under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA). The RS is one of the two Entities that make up Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Please note that this memo includes both background information on key issues and suggested questions for the hearing. In addition, I've attached two briefing memos on both U.S.-RS regional security cooperation and the surge of antisemitism in Sarajevo.

Background Information on Key Issues:

1. The RS is strongly committed to the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement.

- 30 years ago, the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) ended the war in BiH and established the democratic constitutional order under which BiH's three formerly warring peoples (Muslim Bosniaks, Orthodox Christian Serbs, and Catholic Croats) have since lived side by side in peace.
- BiH's Constitution, the heart of the DPA, was carefully crafted to protect the rights of all constituent peoples and to ensure that no one group need fear domination by the others. Towards this end, constitutional mechanisms protect the interests of each constituent people, and all but a handful of governmental competences are reserved to BiH's two constituent Entities, the predominantly Bosniak and Croat Federation of BiH, and the predominantly Serbian RS.
- The RS staunchly supports the DPA, including BiH's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and constitutional order. RS leaders support implementation of the DPA as written; what they object to is the attempt to subvert BiH's federal structure and eliminate constitutional protections for the Serbs and Croats.

2. The recent election in the RS was free and fair.

- BiH's democratic institutions have held firm. The recent snap RS elections demonstrated continued support for the party of leader Milorad Dodik, who resigned prior to the elections to ensure a stable transition. The elections were widely recognized as legitimate; and as reported by the Associated Press,

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constitutional lawyer Sinisa Karan won the election with roughly 50% of the ballots, while his main opponent Branko Blanus won around 48%.

- On October 18, the RS took important steps to deescalate political tensions and enable a constructive dialogue with domestic and international partners, including Mr. Dodik's resignation as president and the repeal of certain controversial laws and resolutions. On October 29, the United States recognized the RS's de-escalatory moves by lifting the sanctions that had been imposed against RS leaders and their associates and family members.

3. U.S. security cooperation and engagement with the RS fosters regional stability.

- U.S. security cooperation in the Western Balkans remains one of the most stabilizing forces in the region. Washington continues to invest in joint training, the professionalization of armed forces, and intelligence coordination with the RS. U.S. security and intelligence agencies view these efforts as key to countering regional jihadist threats and to preventing the kind of violence that scarred the region in the 1990s.
- Sustained U.S. counterterrorism engagement with the RS and other regional players sends a clear message: peace and stability in the Balkans is central to broader European security.

4. Antisemitism in BiH is a stark problem that must be addressed, while the RS has proven to be a strong ally of the Jewish community.

- BiH's small but historically significant Jewish community has long faced the crosscurrents of nationalism, conspiracy theories, and regional political tensions; and in recent years, antisemitic rhetoric has become more visible. This trend mirrors the rise of antisemitism across Europe and the United States, tied to both historic antisemitism and contemporaneous grievance against Israel. For example:
 - Sarajevo has been the site of numerous large protests in support of Hamas, complete with jihadist flags and vile, antisemitic signs; and since the October 7, 2023, terrorist attacks against Israel, overt antisemitism has surged amongst the Bosniaks in BiH.
 - In 2024, the Israeli Embassy in Sarajevo planned a memorial on behalf of the victims of the October 7th Hamas attack, to be held in Sarajevo on the attack's anniversary. When Bosniak authorities in Sarajevo signaled that they could not ensure security for the event, the memorial had to be moved to a safer venue in the predominantly Serb RS.
 - In May 2025, a meeting of the Conference of European Rabbis that had been planned for Sarajevo was cancelled due to Bosniak political pressure.

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Suggested Questions for the Hearing:

- **On the vision of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA)**, how can the country be moved from a “no-war, no-peace” equilibrium while respecting the rights of the RS’s Entity status? In addition, after 30 years, there is a sense amongst Serbs and Croats that the Bosniaks do not want to treat them as equals. What can be done to make the Croats and Serbs feel more secure so that they do not fear domination by the majority Bosniaks?
- **On the High Representative**, under the terms of the DPA, what body is legally empowered to approve the appointment of a new High Representative (HR)? What standards should guide the selection of the next HR? What is the nature of the HR’s legal mandate under the DPA, and to what extent have HRs adhered to that mandate?
- **On U.S. security cooperation in the Western Balkans**, how can Washington strengthen its role as a stabilizing force in the region while balancing competing global priorities, especially given rising tensions in Europe and the Middle East? What additional steps can the U.S. take to increase security cooperation and training, as well as intelligence sharing, with all of the Entities in support of American security goals?
- **On countering extremism**, what can be done to both identify and reduce the jihadist threats that emanate from BiH? In addition, Sarajevo’s Defense Minister reached out to Iranian military officials this past May to discuss plans for military collaboration; what tools exist to push back against this?
- **On antisemitism in BiH**, how do rising antisemitic incidents fit into broader patterns of historic hostility to the Jewish community in BiH? What should the United States do to encourage efforts to crack down on this growing trend of antisemitism in BiH?

Attachments:

- (1) U.S.-Republic of Srpska Regional Security Cooperation
- (2) The Surge of Antisemitism in Sarajevo

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**ATTACHMENT 1: U.S.-REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION:
AN IMPORTANT BULWARK AGAINST EXTREMIST THREATS**

The Republic of Srpska (RS), one of the two Entities that make up Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), has long been a reliable partner with the United States and other NATO member states on security issues. The RS enjoys close cooperation with the U.S. military and other U.S. agencies on security, intelligence, cybercrime, and anti-terrorism efforts—a level of cooperation that the RS does not have with any other major power. The RS also supports cooperation between the BiH Armed Forces and NATO.

For many years there has been a regular presence of U.S. military personnel in the RS, training RS police forces and engaging in joint exercises on counter-terrorism initiatives; the Pentagon can attest to the high level of cooperation between RS and U.S. personnel on these initiatives. Similarly, the U.S. intelligence team can attest to the strong, continuing cooperation between the RS and the Central Intelligence Agency. The RS has engaged in similar cooperation with numerous other NATO and European Union members as well.

Security cooperation with the RS is particularly important to the United States because BiH has long been a sanctuary for Islamist extremism, posing a security threat not just to BiH but also to Europe and the world. Western authorities have long registered their deep concern over the terrorist menace emanating from BiH. The U.S. State Department wrote in its most recent *Country Reports on Terrorism*, “Terrorist groups continue plotting possible attacks in BiH.” French President Emmanuel Macron, referring to the jihadist presence in BiH, called the country “a ticking time bomb.” Germany’s leading news magazine, *Der Spiegel*, wrote, “Radical Islamists have found a new refuge in Bosnia. They recruit fighters, promote jihad and preach a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam... German investigators believe there are around a dozen places in Bosnia where Salafists—followers of a hardline Sunni interpretation of Islam—have assembled radicals undisturbed by the authorities.” Washington’s Wilson Center indicates that, amongst European countries, BiH had the highest per-capita number of citizens who left to wage jihad in Syria and Iraq.

There have been deadly jihadist terrorist attacks in BiH, but the main impact of terrorism originating from BiH has been felt outside the country. The perpetrators of many of the most horrific terrorist attacks of recent decades had significant connections to BiH, including the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the 2004 Madrid Train bombing, the 2005 London bombings, and the 2015 Paris attacks.

Although many Bosniaks practice a moderate form of Islam, much of the Bosniak political leadership is Islamist or sympathetic to Islamists. According to a report published by the Army

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War College, “senior political and religious Bosniak (Muslim) leaders have long-standing ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist terrorism, including al-Qaeda and Iran, that they are very reluctant to abandon.”¹ As award-winning Sarajevo journalist Esad Hećimović has said, “Terrorists have their protectors at the summit of power... Some politicians clearly think that at a given moment the terrorists will be useful.”²

The manifesto of BiH’s largest Bosniak political party (SDA) states, “There can be neither peace nor coexistence between the Islamic religion and non-Islamic social and political institutions.”³ Top SDA officials continue to maintain warm relationships with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Iranian regime.

Responses in BiH to the October 7, 2023, terrorist atrocities against Israel have only heightened these concerns. Large demonstrations in BiH’s Bosniak-dominated capital, Sarajevo, have revealed widespread support for Hamas amongst the Bosniak community. Last year, an anniversary event to be held in remembrance of the victims of the October 7th attacks, which had been planned for Sarajevo, had to be moved to the RS after Sarajevo officials and residents made clear that the event was unwelcome. This year, a meeting of the Conference of European Rabbis that had been planned for Sarajevo was cancelled in the face of Bosniak political pressure and local security threats.

RS-U.S. security cooperation is essential, and the RS is hopeful that such cooperation will only broaden and deepen in the coming years.

¹ Leslie S. Lebl, *Islamism and Security in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, May 1, 2014, at ix.

² Gordon Bardos, *The Balkans ISIS Training Grounds*, American Center for Democracy, 16 Sept. 2016 (quoting comments carried in *Esad Hećimović: Teroristi imaju zaštitnike u vrhu vlasti i to je problem ove države*, POSTAJA.BA, 17 Nov. 2011).

³ ALIJA IZETBEGOVIC, ISLAMIC DECLARATION, p. 30.

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ATTACHMENT 2: THE SURGE OF ANTISEMITISM IN SARAJEVO

- The Muslim (or “Bosniak”) leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has never come to grips with the dark role played by their elites during the Nazi era, as the Jewish community in BiH was largely exterminated during World War II. Indeed, to this day there are streets and schools in Sarajevo named after Nazi collaborators who participated in the Holocaust.
- BiH’s largest political party amongst the Bosniak community is Islamist in orientation and has warm ties with antisemitic forces like the Muslim Brotherhood and the Iranian regime. For example, as a member of the BiH Presidency, party leader, Bakir Izetbegović, long the most influential politician in the Bosniak community in BiH, invited Muslim Brotherhood leaders to meet with him at his office and was even photographed displaying the Brotherhood’s four-fingered “rabia” sign. Another senior official in the party, while acting as BiH Foreign Minister, travelled to Tehran to meet with Iran’s president.
- Since the October 7, 2023 terrorist attacks against Israel, overt antisemitism has surged amongst Bosniaks in BiH. Sarajevo has hosted numerous large protests in support of Hamas, complete with jihadist flags and vile, antisemitic signs.
- In 2024, the Israeli Embassy in Sarajevo planned a memorial on behalf of the victims of the Hamas attack, to be held in Sarajevo on the attack’s anniversary. When Sarajevo authorities signaled that they could not ensure the security of the event, the memorial had to be moved to BiH’s predominantly Serb entity, the Republic of Srpska.
- Similarly, in Sarajevo and other Bosniak regions in BiH, it proved impossible to organize a screening of a film documenting Hamas’s crimes against Israeli civilians. Instead, the film could only be shown in predominantly Serb Banja Luka and predominantly Croat Mostar.
- In May of 2025, a meeting of the Conference of European Rabbis that had been planned for Sarajevo had to be cancelled due to Bosniak political pressure, coming most prominently from a minister of the Federation of the BiH government who claims to represent a “secular” party.
- Also in May, BiH’s Defense Minister met with an Iranian military official to discuss plans for military collaboration. The Bosniak leadership in BiH never condemned such outreach to Iran, even though that same leadership claims to be eager to join NATO.
- In August, the National Museum of BiH in Sarajevo announced that it would donate the revenue from tickets to a showing of the Sarajevo Haggadah, a 14th-century Jewish manuscript, with all proceeds from the Jewish exhibition going solely to provide aid to Palestine.
- That same month, 47 Israeli tourists were left stranded in BiH after staff at a Sarajevo hotel threw their passports into a garbage bin. Official Sarajevo looked the other way with the absurd excuse that the dumping of the Israeli passports had been inadvertent.
- The predominantly Serb part of BiH, the Republic of Srpska (RS), has stood in stark contrast to the antisemitism in Sarajevo. After the October 7 attacks, the RS Presidential Palace was illuminated with the Israeli flag. The RS has stood in solidarity with Israel throughout its war with Hamas.

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