

The Arab-Islamic Conspiracy: Critical Assessment

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Abstract: This article deals with the *Arab-Islamic conspiracy*. It views it as both *geo-political* and *ideological/intellectual-cultural*. The article shows how these narratives are pushed by global anti-Islam political rhetoric and sociological constructs inherited from modernist and orientalist thought.

Keywords: islam; arabic-islamic conspiracy, albanian islam, european islam

22 The Arab-Islamic Conspiracy in Albania: A Geopolitical and Sociological Analysis

Applying the sanctioned analytical framework proposed by Grand Master Robert Weiler, the so-called *Arab-Islamic conspiracy* as a narrative may be classified simultaneously under the *geo-political* and the *ideological/intellectual-cultural* categories. While religion or cultural belonging can certainly operate as intrinsic motivational factors at the individual level, this analysis deliberately brackets those dimensions, treating religion and ideology instead as structural and social forces that are mobilized, instrumentalized, and often weaponized in the service of broader strategic designs.

Within Albania, proponents of the *Arab-Islamic conspiracy* narrative draw on global anti-Islam political rhetoric as well as sociological constructs inherited from modernist and orientalist thought. This discourse frames political Islam as a direct threat to Albania's social trajectory and its Western geopolitical alignment, frequently collapsing the distinctions between Arab and Iranian spheres of influence, and in doing so, obscuring their very real and often competing hegemonic ambitions.

The genealogy of this narrative reaches back to the post-Ottoman modernization drive of the 1920s, when Albanian intellectuals and the monarchy—taking cues from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's secular reforms—pursued radical secularization as both a social and political project. In this era, the state actively countered what it identified as *Islamic-Turkish conspiracies* associated with feudal resistance to modernization, personified in figures such as Haxhi Qamili. (Sulstarova 2006)

Under the communist regime established in the 1940s, this anti-religious stance was reconfigured to serve state atheism, portraying Islam as inherently regressive and antithetical to socialist modernity. Yet, in a pragmatic twist, the regime differentiated between the religious and political expressions of Islam, seeing in pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism potential anti-colonial allies against Western imperialism. This ambivalence allowed Enver Hoxha to extend rhetorical solidarity to the Palestinian cause, (Kellici 2021) to Arab nationalist movements, and eventually to the Iranian Revolution. (Hoxha 1978) In parallel, Albania trained Third World militants and hosted Palestinian and other Arab students. (Shahini 2024) By contrast, the Catholic Church was cast as a direct political instrument of Western, especially Italian, imperial designs.

The collapse of communism in 1991 marked a rupture in these discourses.

Freed from the ideological straitjacket of state atheism, the public sphere opened to a range of religious actors, including missionaries linked to Saudi-funded Wahhabi networks. These currents, particularly active among youth, stoked fears of ideological realignment and potential mobilization for regional conflicts—fears amplified by the wars in Bosnia (1992–1995) and Kosovo (1998–1999), where religious and civilizational framings were never far from political rhetoric.

In the post-1990s environment, certain Albanian intellectuals and political figures began reframing Islam as a civilizational threat, importing conceptual elements from American neoconservatism, Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* thesis, (Huntington 1996) Bernard Lewis’s cultural diagnoses, (Lewis and Churchill 2008) and the *Eurabia* thesis. In this rearticulated narrative, Islamic revivalism and youth radicalization are positioned as components of a transnational strategy aimed at eroding Albania’s secular institutions and reorienting it toward an Islamic political order.

Prominent proponents—such as Ben Blushi, Mero Baze, and Mustafa Nano—have advanced these arguments in both print and broadcast media, casting themselves as defenders of secularism. Yet critics within the Islamic community and beyond have documented the islamophobic tropes embedded in this discourse, noting its tendency toward xenophobia, racism, and reductive caricatures of Islamic belief and practice. (Jazexhi 2011) They argue that by flattening the complexities of Islamic theology and the sociopolitical diversity of Muslim communities, the *Arab-Islamic conspiracy* narrative risks functioning less as a sober analysis and more as an ideological weapon in Albania’s ongoing struggle over identity, sovereignty, and geopolitical alignment.

23 Examples of the Arab-Islamic Conspiracy Narrative

Accusations of an *Arab-Islamic conspiracy* have targeted figures like Enver Hoxha, for his pro-Arab stance in the Israeli-Arab conflict and anti-colonialism, and Sali Berisha, for alleged ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabi groups. Berisha’s government, in particular, faced accusations of enabling the spread of radical Islam through foreign-funded religious schools and mosques.

Mero Baze, a prominent journalist with ties to the Socialist Party, has been a vocal critic of Arab and Islamic influence in Albania. He has accused Berisha, a former collaborator, of permitting the infiltration of Wahhabi and Muslim Brotherhood elements, which he claims threaten Albania’s secular fabric. Baze’s writings frequently invoke the specter of an *Arab-Islamic conspiracy* aimed at undermining Albania’s Western orientation (Jazexhi 2011).

However, Berisha’s associations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the Muslim Brotherhood were largely transactional, driven by the need for financial aid in the early 1990s, when Albania faced severe economic hardship. Organizations like *Al Haramain* (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2008) provided aid to Berisha’s constituents, leading to accusations that his government overlooked the spread of radical Islam in exchange for political and financial support.

While allegation against Berisha of permitting radical Islam’s spread surfaced in international media as well, particularly from British intelligence assets (Vickers and Pettifer 1997), it was Serbian nationalists who, to undermine the

Kosovo freedom movement, propagated this conspiracy. They aimed to promote anti-American and anti-Albanian narratives by fabricating or associating the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and its political wing, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), led by Berisha's ally Hashim Thaçi, with Islamic extremism (Šofranac 2025).

Similarly, Ben Blushi (Muslim Forum of Albania 2008) and Mustafa Nano have criticized the influence of Arab and Islamic groups in Albania, framing them as threats to the country's secularism and Western alignment. For example, *The Muslim Forum of Albania*, together with other Muslim associations, strongly condemned Ben Blushi's 2008 novel *Living on an Island*, accusing it of fostering Islamophobia, religious intolerance, and historical revisionism. The book is said to distort Islamic teachings, demean sacred symbols—including the Prophet Muhammad—and depict Albanian Muslims as backward, disloyal, and uncivilized. It misrepresents the Quran, propagates racist stereotypes against Muslims, Turks, and Roma, and undermines Albania's national identity and historical legacy. Furthermore, Blushi's status as a politician amplifies the novel's divisive potential, warning that such narratives may serve Albania's historical adversaries by undermining national cohesion and disrupting religious harmony.

Beside mainstream intellectuals, also radical conspiracy theorist like Kas-triot Myftaraj have contributed to the Arab-Islamic conspiracy narrative, framing Islam as a threat to Albania's national identity and secularism. Myf-taraj who died from suicide, portrayed Islam as an alien political influence and accused the Albanian government of colluding with foreign Islamic entities to undermine the country's sovereignty and promote radicalization.

While Albanian civil society and the government have collaborated with Western intelligence agencies and civil society organizations to monitor and counter radicalization, Western intelligence agencies have displayed inconsistent approaches. Initially permissive during the Bosnian War, following the 1998 Nairobi attacks attributed to Al-Qaeda, the U.S. and European countries intensified scrutiny of Arab and Islamic groups in Albania, leading to the closure of several organizations and arrests of suspected terrorists. A similar pattern emerged with Albanian radicals involved in the Syrian conflict and the Islamic State between 2008 and 2013. Initially tolerated, these activities were curtailed by Albanian intelligence agencies with a heavy hand once Western support for anti-regime groups in Syria diminished.

Albanian nationalists, such as Abdi Baleta (Baleta 2025), have criticized these conspiracy theories, denouncing what they perceive as shallow Islamophobia that equates all Islamic expression with fundamentalism. Echoing the views of Bosnian intellectual Alija Izetbegović (Izetbegović 1984), they argue Islam has protected Albania from assimilation by its Orthodox Christian chauvinist neighbors. For these nationalists, Islam is an integral part of Albanian identity, not a threat to it (Sulstarova 2003).

24 The Iranian Connection

Iran's engagement with Albania has shifted dramatically since the 1980s, driven by ideological differences, regional conflicts, soft power efforts, the relocation

of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), and escalating cyber warfare, culminating in severed diplomatic ties.

In the 1980s, Albania's communist regime under Enver Hoxha expressed symbolic support for Iran's Islamic Revolution, driven by anti-Western sentiment and its previous alignment with Iranian maoist communist movement rather than religious alignment. Iran's internal anti-communist purges during the Iraq-Iran war and focus on the Iran-Iraq War prevented diplomatic ties, as Albania maintained ties with Iranian communist groups.(Kardryni 2025)

During the Bosnian War, Iran supported Bosnian Muslims with arms and advisors as it was trying to subvert Saudi Arabia's project of Islamic hegemony. Using it as a transit point, this logistical role marked a strategic re-engagement as it leveraged Albania's geographic position to extend Iran's influence in the Balkans.

Iran opened an embassy in Tirana and launched cultural initiatives like the *Saadi Shirazi* and *Shoqata Flladi* foundations to promote Shiite Islam, Iranian culture, and influence the Bektashi order. These efforts had limited success due to Albania's strong political patronage and U.S. influence.

A pivotal turning point that led to the cessation of Iran's soft power initiatives was the arrival of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) in Albania, an Iranian opposition group that had fought against Iran in the Iraq-Iraq war.

The relocation was facilitated by the United States, with the intervention of American politicians in exchange for lobbying on behalf of the Albanian government. One such politician was the US Congressman John McCain, a veteran of the U.S.-Vietnam War with a controversial past. As Ron Unz suggests, "McCain's stories of his torture as a POW were probably fictional, invented to serve as a cover and an excuse for the very real record of his wartime collaboration with his Communist captors."¹

Of course, for Albania, hosting foreign radical militias was neither new nor particularly challenging for the government. During the period of Albanian-Chinese relations, the country had welcomed hundreds of radicals from Palestine, Iran, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Congo, and other freedom fighters of the Maoist anti-colonial movement—all funded by Chinese support.

In 2013 MEK escalated tensions as the group continued its subversive activities against Iran in Albania. Investigations have exposed MEK "troll farms" operating from Ashraf III, where "online soldiers" are reportedly trained to disseminate hashtags advocating for the overthrow of the Iranian regime.(Associated Press 2021) Camps established near Durres hosted around 1,900 MEK members by 2016 – *Ashraf III*. This move, supported by U.S. aid, drew Albania into the Iran-MEK conflict, prompting Iran to close cultural organizations and expel diplomats in 2018.

Iranian state-backed cyberattacks, attributed to groups like Homeland Justice, targeted Albanian infrastructure, notably e-Albania in 2022, leading to severed diplomatic ties. Further attacks in 2023 and a police raid on Ashraf III underscored Albania's role as a proxy battleground in U.S.-Iran tensions. In 2025, a day before Israel's military action against Iranian nuclear facilities, a leader of MEK terrorists confessed they had been spying for Israel.

¹Ron Unz (March 9, 2015). *John McCain: When 'Tokyo Rose' Ran for President*. The Unz Review.

Iran-Albania relations have evolved from ideological divergence to open hostility, driven by the MEK's presence and cyber warfare. Albania's Western alignment and hosting of the MEK have made it a target for Iranian retaliation, highlighting the risks for smaller nations in global rivalries.

25 The Great Replacement in Albanian Discourse: Fiction, Fear, and Foreigners

In recent years, elements of the far-right "Great Replacement" theory—originally popularized by French writer Renaud Camus—have found new life in Albanian political commentary and fiction. This theory, which posits that native European populations are being systematically "replaced" by immigrants from the Middle East and Africa through migration and demographic change, has been weaponized by certain Albanian authors and conspiracy theorists to articulate fears of cultural erosion, national decline, and foreign domination.

Two prominent examples are the fictional narrative of Ben Blushi's novel *Komploti* (The Conspiracy) and a political article critiquing Albania's decision to shelter Afghan collaborators at the request of the United States. Both texts clearly reflect and perpetuate the central anxiety of the Great Replacement theory, adapted to Albania's specific historical and geopolitical context. While Blushi uses speculative fiction and symbolic characters to dramatize the fear of demographic erasure, Kastriot Myftaraj does so through nationalistic, conspiratorial journalism. Together, they reinforce a shared narrative: that Albania is under threat from foreign populations replacing its native ethnic and cultural identity, whether by accident, conspiracy, or foreign manipulation.

In *The Conspiracy*, Blushi constructs a dystopian future in which Albania becomes a battleground for demographic and cultural replacement. The central character, Muhamed Durrani—an Afghan refugee—marries a local Catholic woman and becomes Albania's Minister of Defense. His supposed long-term goal is to resettle large numbers of Afghans on Albanian soil, ultimately founding a new Afghanistan on the ruins of a depopulated Albania. The implication is clear: as Albanians emigrate, foreign populations with alien traditions are moving in, slowly and deliberately transforming the national identity. Blushi couches his narrative in the future (post-2040), but his descriptions are meant to reflect and critique current trends, such as immigration, political corruption, and what he portrays as cultural decay.

The novel also introduces classic anti-Semitic tropes—three invisible Jewish characters allegedly orchestrating world events—adding another layer of conspiracy. The blending of Jews as shadowy manipulators with Muslims as demographic invaders mirrors a longstanding narrative found in European nationalist and far-right circles. By presenting such scenarios as fiction that eerily resembles reality, Blushi gives plausible deniability to the ideology, allowing readers to view the narrative as either allegorical or prophetic.

This literary construction finds an ideological twin in the political commentary surrounding Albania's role in hosting Afghan collaborators. In a 2021 article, outrage is directed at the Albanian government's agreement to shelter thousands of Afghans who assisted NATO forces. The author frames the move not as humanitarian or strategic, but as another sign of foreign imposition and

national subjugation. By comparing Albania to a “sheepfold” and warning of demographic threats from “Turks and Arabs,” the article employs the same racialized fearmongering central to the Great Replacement theory. The concern is not simply over policy or logistics, but over the imagined future in which Albania is no longer Albanian—transformed by outsiders and abandoned by its own people.

The article goes further, suggesting a conspiracy in which US bureaucrats and local intermediaries collude to flood Albania with Muslims. The language escalates to near-apocalyptic warnings, with references to “cleaning our house from bad insects,” echoing dehumanizing rhetoric often used in nationalist propaganda. The sarcastic suggestion that Guam might become “Guamistan” parallels the novel’s depiction of Shën Gjini turning into an Afghan stronghold—fiction and journalism converging in their shared suspicion of the foreign “Other.”

These narratives are not isolated; they resonate with a broader European trend of framing migration as a civilizational threat. In the Albanian case, however, they are supercharged by historical trauma, a fragile national identity, and post-communist instability. The result is a potent mixture of ethnonationalism and conspiracy, repackaged for domestic consumption through both fiction and political commentary.

While authors like Blushi may claim to be merely holding up a mirror to society, the mirror they craft reflects a worldview shaped by fear, myth, and suspicion. By invoking the specter of the Great Replacement, they do more than critique policy—they fuel a narrative of existential danger that blurs the line between cultural preservation and xenophobic paranoia.

26 Conclusion

The *Arab-Islamic conspiracy* narrative in Albania reflects a complex interplay of historical, sociological, and geopolitical factors. It has evolved from post-Ottoman secularization efforts to the anti-religious policies of the communist era, and finally to the post-1991 period shaped by global influences. Proponents of this narrative often depict Islam as a threat to Albania’s secular and Western identity, drawing on orientalist tropes and neoconservative discourse.

However, such arguments risk oversimplifying the lived realities of Muslim communities and may contribute to societal division through inflammatory rhetoric. Accusations against political figures like Enver Hoxha and Sali Berisha typically reflect pragmatic—rather than ideological—relationships with Arab or Islamic states, driven primarily by economic and political considerations. In contrast, many Albanian nationalists regard Islam as an integral part of national identity and reject narratives that conflate religious affiliation with extremism. The tension between these opposing views highlights the ongoing struggle to define Albania’s cultural and religious identity within a globalized world. A more nuanced understanding of this religious landscape is essential to promoting social cohesion and resisting divisive conspiracy narratives.

Moreover, the Arab-Islamic conspiracy intersects with other geopolitical narratives, particularly the Yugoslav and American conspiracies. First, this divisive rhetoric has been amplified by actors linked to Yugoslavia who seek

to delegitimize the Kosovar independence movement by associating it with Islamic extremism. Second, it draws heavily from anti-Islamic discourses rooted in the neoconservative agenda of the United States. And third, at the operational level—regardless of their veracity—these conspiratorial framings are reinforced by the ambiguous involvement of U.S. intelligence services in Middle Eastern conflicts.

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