



Rob Dobi

GLOBAL

FIRST HE BECAME AN AMERICAN— THEN HE JOINED ISIS

When the FBI discovered a network of Bosnian-Americans giving support to terrorists, they also discovered Abdullah Ramo Pazara, a U.S. citizen and a battalion commander in Syria.

By Seamus Hughes and Bennett Clifford

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ABDULLAH RAMO PAZARA had a craving for packets of instant hot cocoa. The Bosnian-American former truck driver was, at the time, a commander of an Islamic State tank battalion in Syria. Apparently, even foreign fighters who reject their former lives in Western countries for a chance at martyrdom for ISIS sometimes long for the creature comforts of their previous homes.

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In 2013, six Bosnian immigrants in the United States allegedly sent money, riflescopes, knives, military equipment, and other supplies to jihadists in Syria and Iraq through intermediaries in Bosnia and Turkey. According to the U.S. government’s allegations, individual ISIS fighters would make specific requests—mostly for money and military equipment—and the group would then raise funds and send supplies to Syria. The requests included what was surely an unexpected revelation of nostalgia—packets of Swiss Miss hot cocoa. By sending the cocoa mix and other supplies, federal prosecutors argue, these U.S.-based Bosnians provided what is known as “material support” to terrorists, in violation of the Patriot Act.

When the Bosnian cluster was indicted in February 2015 and subsequently prosecuted in federal court, the U.S. government divulged a raft of evidence from social media, web forums, and email, which exposed six members of the Bosnian-American community, a majority-Muslim immigrant group that most people—rightly, for the most part—don’t typically think of as connected to ISIS. The allegations also revealed one Bosnian-American man’s journey from possible anti-Muslim combatant to American citizen to ISIS commander.

To uncover Abdullah Ramo Pazara’s story, we spent months tracking down the fragments of Pazara’s life from around the world—U.S. federal court documents in the Eastern District of Missouri, reports of military records from a Serbian nationalist paramilitary formation, truckers’ licenses from the state of Michigan, media accounts, Facebook posts from a villa in Azaz, Syria. Our reconstruction shows an upbringing shattered by civil war and violence in Bosnia, followed by a failed transition to civilian life in the United States. And then, Pazara found a network of like-minded individuals and friends—people who allegedly backed his growing fanaticism and then his ascent into the innermost circles of the Islamic State in Syria.

This is the story of Abdullah Ramo Pazara’s path to radicalization, and the six U.S.-based Bosnians charged with supporting his violent jihad.

RAMO PAZARA WAS born in 1976 in the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, then a part of communist Yugoslavia. He grew up in the small Bosnian-Muslim village of Gomjenica on the outskirts of Teslic, a postindustrial town in Bosnia’s ethnic-Serbian-majority region. The Teslic of Pazara’s

youth was a multiethnic and multi-religious municipality where Bosnian Muslims like Pazara lived alongside Orthodox Serbians and Catholic Croats.

Pazara was just 16 years old when civil war tore Yugoslavia apart. In April 1992, the ethnic-Serb paramilitary force in Bosnia, known as Vojska Republika Srpska, or VRS, demanded that Teslic's Bosnian-Muslim residents swear allegiance to the VRS and relinquish their weapons. Some complied, but most refused. In the following months, the VRS began a campaign of ethnic cleansing in the Teslic region, including setting up camps for Bosnian Muslims and Croats, engaging in mass raping and killing, and shelling Bosnian-Muslim villages around Teslic.

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It appears that Pazara may have helped them. Multiple reports by Bosnian [news outlets](#) assert that he fought for the VRS. In February 2015, the online newspaper *Sloboda Bosna* [claimed](#) it had found military records that proved Pazara was a soldier in the VRS from 1993 to 1994. These reports were bolstered by Bosnian political analyst Dzevad Galijasevic, who said an official inside the Republika Srpska confirmed to him that the government had records on Pazara from his time in the VRS. Dr. Vlado Azinovic, a Bosnian political analyst and expert on Bosnian foreign fighters, also confirmed the existence of records of Pazara's service in the VRS. According to these records, Pazara apparently joined the VRS at the age of 17 alongside his father and fought in the Pelagicevo region and in the towns of Majevisa and Bihac. During the height of the war, in 1994, Pazara served as a sniper for a VRS unit fighting in the Bosnian-Croatian border town of Orasje. In other words, this future jihadist may have begun his career in combat by helping Serbs slaughter Muslims.

Whichever side Pazara was on during the Bosnian War, understanding his experiences during those years is critical to making sense of his radicalization. After the civil war ended in 1995, and after Pazara and his father completed their alleged tour of duty for the VRS, they were still not allowed to return to their hometown of Teslic. Staying in Teslic or refusing the VRS would have surely resulted in imprisonment and torture. Ultimately, Pazara and his father were subject to the same ethnic cleansing inflicted on the rest of the Bosnian-Muslim residents. And so, Pazara carried the baggage of the Bosnian War to his new home in the United States.

WHILE RECORDS FROM Pazara's early years in America are sparse, he appears to have come to the United States during the late 1990s. Upon his arrival, Pazara would have faced an immediate conundrum that could explain the lack of available records about him from that time. If Pazara disclosed his participation in the Bosnian-Serb Army on immigration forms, as required by law, the Bosnian diaspora community in the United States would have cut off all available means of social support to Pazara. He also could have been subject to prosecution for war crimes and deportation back to Bosnia. So Pazara may have declined to disclose his war records, thus committing immigration fraud but keeping the true details of his time during the war a secret.

If reports of Pazara's VRS service are indeed true and were discovered, he would have been a pariah in America's Bosnian diaspora. After all, many Bosnian-Muslim refugees of Pazara's generation—especially in the large Bosnian communities in Detroit, Michigan; Utica, New York; and Saint Louis, Missouri—saw their hometowns destroyed and family members killed at the hands of the VRS and other Serb paramilitary forces, forcing them to flee the country. His desire to erase any doubt about his connection to his fellow Muslims may explain, at least in part, why Pazara turned to religious extremism and eventually headed to Syria to join ISIS. Any encouragement he received may have fed his zeal.

The first official record of Pazara in America is a driver's license application from 2003, listing his address as an apartment in Warren, Michigan. In 2004, the address on the license changed, this time to a small house he bought with his then-wife. The license also was updated to a Class A commercial driver's license, a necessary change to become a commercial truck driver. License in hand, Pazara and his wife registered a trucking company that they operated out of their house. The company ran one truck—a 1999 Kenworth big rig—and mainly took moving and shipping jobs.

An immigrant family moving into their first house and launching their own business sounds like the starting point of the American Dream. However, the Pazaras' company went belly-up almost immediately, registering less than \$10,000 in annual profits from 2004 to 2007. The failure would augur the deterioration of the Pazaras' marriage. They filed for divorce in 2007.

In 2008, with only \$1,000 in his bank account and \$10,000 in unpaid debt, Pazara filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy in the state of Michigan and agreed to forfeit most of his property, including the Kenworth truck and the house in Warren. At the time of the bankruptcy, Pazara's only reported income was financial assistance from his family, who had also moved to the United States. From the bankruptcy in 2008 until 2011, Pazara maintained addresses in the Detroit area, although additional evidence suggests he spent considerable time with relatives in Utica. Photos on Facebook depict Pazara in Utica with his brother, sister-in-law, and their family. Additional records show that Pazara's parents also lived in Utica.

So, too, did a man named Nihad Rosic. Rosic's family, originally from Velika Kladusa, Bosnia, were close family friends of Pazara's brother. The Pazaras and Rosics are *kumovi*, a Bosnian relationship that falls somewhere between best friends and godparents. Rosic, a truck driver like Pazara, once fought as a mediocre mixed-martial artist. (Nicknamed "The Dragon," Rosic boasted a career record of 0-1-0, with one loss by submission.)

Rosic and Pazara likely met each other while Pazara was visiting Utica. They developed a tight connection and frequently contacted each other on social media. According to Rosic's attorney, he "turned a corner" in terms of his religiosity around 2011, the same time that Pazara also began adopting more radical religious beliefs. Until then, Pazara had looked more like a tough, secular American biker—more likely to end up at Sturgis than in Syria—a big guy with long blond hair, a motorcycle, and black clothes.

Pazara posted a picture of himself in Syria standing under the black flag of ISIS, making his allegiances clear.

Where documentation of Pazara's life in America is thin, Rosic's life is laid out in his arrest record. In 2011, he was arrested and charged with endangering the welfare of a child after punching a woman who was carrying a baby in her arms. Then, in 2012, he served a year in jail after he was arrested for beating his wife with a belt in front of their children. (The dispute arose when Rosic found a bottle of perfume in the house, which he interpreted—mistakenly, according to even the most conservative jurists in Islam—as violating the Islamic prohibition on alcohol-based products.)

When Pazara moved to the Oakbrook housing projects in South St. Louis in late 2011 in search of work, he and Rosic remained in touch. By then, Pazara had grown

out his beard and wore only conservative Muslim dress. The St. Louis metropolitan area is home to over 70,000 Bosnian Muslims, the largest Bosnian community outside of Europe. Many are refugees from the Bosnian War, and most are well-integrated into the city. But though Pazara was living in a large, tight-knit Bosnian community, one local leader later told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that “nobody” knew him. What’s more, despite Pazara’s embrace of conservative Islam, none of the local imams in St. Louis’s many mosques claim to have known him; his landlord and neighbors, who noted that he kept to himself, echoed that sentiment.

Pazara did, in fact, have a small handful of friends in the St. Louis area—in particular, the Hodzic family. Ramiz Zijad Hodzic was a veteran of the Bosnian military and fought in the civil war against the VRS, even winning the Golden Lily, Bosnia’s highest military honor, in 1995. Hodzic and his wife, Sedina Unkic Hodzic, arrived in the United States as refugees. Like Pazara, they had roots in Teslic. Also like Pazara—and Rosic—Hodzic was a truck driver and appears to have helped Pazara get a job as one in St. Louis. But trucking didn’t pay Hodzic enough to support his family, and they suffered financially, unable to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in overdue state and federal taxes.

The Hodzics were also by no means lifelong conservative Muslims. According to the *Dispatch*, Hodzic’s neighbors complained that he would often drunkenly barbecue in his backyard while using an inordinate amount of lighter fluid. But, when Pazara arrived in St. Louis, the Hodzics began to express their faith more. Sedina Hodzic only began wearing a hijab a few months before her eventual arrest.

It is impossible to know with certainty what led Pazara to radicalize. The distance from his homeland, his professional failures, and his divorce all likely played some role. Certainly, a turn toward conservative religiosity in a period following personal loss is a well-documented phenomenon in the literature on radicalization. What is known is that Pazara found solace on social media, where an online community of Bosnian Salafists created a philosophical echo chamber. Within that echo chamber, the Islamic State’s ideology reverberated, exploiting personal grievances, laying out a narrative of victimhood (“Muslims are under attack”) that seemed to excuse Pazara from responsibility for his failures, and offering a new chance at success and redemption.

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ON MAY 17, 2013, Ramo Pazara became a naturalized American citizen. The brochure for the naturalization ceremony shows his official name change: Abdullah Ramo Pazara. According to an eyewitness who spoke to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Pazara stayed for the ceremony, took his certificate, and promptly left. Eleven days later, he departed for Syria, traveling through Zagreb, Croatia; Bosnia; and Istanbul. He arrived in Syria in July 2013.

Initially, Pazara was not supposed to travel alone. According to the indictment, Rosic—now going by the *kunya*, or nom de guerre, Abu Ayesha al-Mudzhahid—had intended to travel alongside Pazara. But his 2012 domestic-violence charge landed him in prison. Once released, he reached out to Pazara, now fighting in Syria under the *kunya* Abdullah al-Amriki. Pazara's new Facebook account bore the same name. When he posted a picture of himself in Syria standing under the black flag of ISIS, Pazara made his allegiances clear to all, including law enforcement.

Law-enforcement officials claim Pazara is present in pictures of a mass beheading of Iraqi soldiers by ISIS.

Risking being shunned in a Bosnian community in the United States is one thing; joining ISIS while concealing a background of service to the VRS is another, far more dangerous step. But Pazara would have had a few cards in his favor. Today, many Bosnian ISIS supporters are simply too young to have fought in the Bosnian War and

may not view Pazara's alleged participation in the VRS as damning, or even relevant. The only connection that likely matters to them is their mutual interest in Salafi jihadism. Plus, Pazara's military know-how may have impressed them. Most of the new generation of American recruits who join jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, despite frequently espousing brutal violence, have little actual battlefield experience. Pazara's time in the Bosnian War likely facilitated his rise within ISIS—a feat that distinguished him from a majority of other Western recruits.

In the meantime, Ramiz and Sedina Hodzic allegedly began reaching out to online contacts to collect funds and buy supplies for Pazara and ISIS. The 2015 federal [indictment](#) lays out the alleged funding plan, which began in August 2013 and continued for at least a year. During that time, Pazara allegedly used Facebook and email to request specific items, coordinate shipments, give updates on his location and status, and share information about the jihad in Syria, including posting videos and pictures of him participating in military actions. Law-enforcement officials [claim](#) Pazara is present in pictures of a mass beheading of Iraqi soldiers by ISIS in 2014. Online supporters left him positive comments and encouragement.

In total, four people allegedly sent money to Ramiz and Sedina Hodzic to help purchase military equipment and supplies for Pazara and other foreign fighters in Syria. Using Western Union money orders and PayPal, they allegedly deposited money into the Hodzics' account. According to the [indictment](#), the money was used to purchase “U.S. military uniforms, combat boots, military surplus goods, tactical gear and clothing, firearms accessories, optical equipment and range finders, [and] rifle scopes.” The Hodzics allegedly sent the supplies to unnamed individuals in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, who then transferred the materials to Pazara and other Bosnian fighters in Syria and Iraq. In addition, they allegedly collected funds for the families of Bosnian foreign fighters.

The provision of “material support” from networks within a community in the United States to fighters in ISIS-held territory is by no means unique to Pazara's cluster. The Program on Extremism's [report](#) *ISIS in America: From Retweets to Raqqa* highlights a number of these cases, including the Bosnian networks that supported Pazara. One example is [Abdi Nur](#), a Somali-American from Minnesota who traveled to Syria to join ISIS in 2014 and was materially assisted by several members of the Somali community in the Twin Cities. In [2015](#), according to court records, several immigrants from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were arrested in New York City after giving money to their friend, 19-year-old Akhror Saidakhmetov, to buy a plane ticket to travel to join ISIS.

The first person alleged to send money to Hodzic was Mediha Salkicevic, a 34-year-old mother of four from Schiller Park, Illinois. According to the [indictment](#), Salkicevic, like Hodzic and Pazara, was originally from Teslic and was granted asylum in the United States after the Bosnian War. On social media, she used the handles

“Medy Ummuluna” and “Bosna Mexico” to communicate with the Hodzics. She also ran a Facebook page called “Sadaka Teslic,” which held auctions on donated items to support destitute Bosnian-Muslim families in Teslic. On August 10, 2013, she allegedly transferred \$1,500 into an account used by Ramiz Hodzic, and over the course of Pazara’s time in Syria, allegedly sent him at least \$3,000. Salkicevic also used Facebook on numerous occasions to interact with Pazara directly, at one point indicating that she was praying for the “brothers and sisters” in Syria and that “death would follow to the infidels.”

Jasminka Ramic allegedly sent money to the Hodzics on September 20, 2013. A 43-year-old substitute lunch lady for District 205 of the Rockford, Illinois, public-school system and a mother of two, Ramic entered the United States in 2000 as a political refugee from Bosnia and became a naturalized citizen in 2006. In total, she was accused of donating \$700 worth of money and supplies to the effort.

Armin Harcevic allegedly sent \$1,500 to the Hodzics. He worked as a handyman in St. Louis, though the extent of his interactions with either Pazara or the Hodzics in St. Louis prior to giving them money is unclear. However, according to two separate sources in the United States and Bosnia close to the investigation, Armin’s brother, Haris, allegedly traveled with Pazara to Turkey and then possibly onto Syria. Haris Harcevic, however, quickly returned to the United States while Pazara stayed in Syria. Haris has not been publicly charged with any offenses related to Pazara.

Nihad Rosic allegedly still planned to join Pazara in Syria and engaged in a series of long conversations with him on Facebook in April 2014. Rosic told Pazara that he “couldn’t wait to face the enemies,” and he asked whether Pazara himself would be available to pick him up at the Turkish-Syrian border. He allegedly sent the Hodzics money that same month and attempted to go to Syria on July 20, 2014. However, when Rosic tried to board Norwegian Airways Flight DY7002 to Oslo, Norway, for the first leg of his journey, he was prevented from flying due to the conditions of his probation.

Pazara served under al-Shishani as the commander of a tank battalion, a rank that exceeds what most of ISIS’s American fighters can achieve.

Rosic’s failed voyage to Syria may have tipped off law enforcement to the funding scheme; other U.S. networks have been caught after attempts at travel. It would take federal agents another couple months to piece together all the social-media records

involved and translate them from Bosnian to English. Finally, in February 2015, the U.S. Attorney's Office filed indictments against Nihad Rosic, Ramiz Hodzic, Sedina Unkic Hodzic, Mediha Salkicevic, Jasminka Ramic, and Armin Harcevic. Federal agents arrested all six defendants.

Abdullah Ramo Pazara, more than 6,000 miles away, was named but not charged in the indictment.

LATER THAT YEAR, another court case would point to more clues in Pazara's story. In November 2015, a Salafi-jihadist imam named Bilal Bosnic was sent to prison in Bosnia and Herzegovina for recruiting young men to travel to Syria. A wandering preacher, Bosnic traveled throughout Bosnia and its European diaspora giving fiery lectures on Islam and its precepts. But Bosnic was best-known to multiple intelligence agencies across Europe for proselytizing on behalf of ISIS, and he was arrested in "Operation Damascus," a Bosnian government roundup of jihadist recruiters. According to trial witnesses, Bosnic took advantage of populations who were amenable to the ISIS recruiting pitch: the financially troubled, the young, and Bosnian immigrants in Western countries. During Bosnic's trial, it emerged that he was connected to at least 15 Bosnian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, including Pazara.

Pazara's success in the ISIS hierarchy can be traced in part to his close relationships with two of Bosnic's most successful recruits: Mirza Ganic, a young social-media superstar of the Bosnian ISIS contingent, and Bajro Ikanovic, a seasoned Bosnian jihadist and the commander of an ISIS training camp in northern Syria. A number of photos on Pazara's Facebook account show the three of them together in Syria.

Ganic, also known as Abu Shahid, was in charge of multiple Bosnian pro-ISIS online forums, where he frequently posted images of himself and other foreign fighters. Originally from Serbia, the cyber-savvy Ganic joined ISIS while still in high school. Despite his youth, Ganic's prolific social-media presence commanded the respect of a large swath of Bosnian foreign fighters. According to the indictment, the members of the Hodzics' funding circle in the United States even interacted with Ganic online. Ramiz Hodzic posted a picture of a combat knife, boasting that Ganic was interested in obtaining the weapon for "slaughtering." Mediha Salkicevic commented that she thought the knife was "super." When Ganic was killed in Aleppo in September 2014 at the age of 19, Pazara posted on Facebook: "My brother Abu Shahid was martyred. I pray to Allah to grant him Jannah [heaven] and the paradise of Firdaus, and bring him together in Jannah with the prophet of Allah."

While Ganic's work in the Bosnian ISIS contingent focused on social-media outreach, his compatriot in Pazara's photos, Bajro Ikanovic, was more like Pazara: the older military muscle. But Ikanovic also had extensive involvement in jihadist organizations throughout the 2000s. In 2005, he was arrested for plotting to blow up a Western

embassy (though he had not yet decided on which one) in Sarajevo—for which he served four years in a Bosnian prison. This made him a force within the ranks of the Bosnian foreign fighters. Initially, Ikanovic was the commander of an independent unit of Balkan foreign fighters, but ultimately, he fought under the command of Tarkhan Taymurazovich Batirashvili, the red-bearded, Georgian-born military leader known to most as Omar al-Shishani. According to *SAFF.ba*, Ikanovic followed al-Shishani from al-Qaeda's Jabhat al-Nusra to ISIS.

Ikanovic was rewarded for his loyalty: al-Shishani appointed him to be the director of the largest ISIS training camp in northern Syria. There, Ikanovic “appropriated” a mansion from a former Assad regime official in the border town of Azaz, where he hosted incoming foreign fighters from the Balkans. A number of pictures on social media depict Pazara, Ganic, and other Bosnian foreign fighters at this location, whose large swimming pool and fountain make it instantly recognizable. Ikanovic reportedly died in Iraq in March 2016.

Pazara uploaded a photo album of dead Kurdish combatants who were killed fighting Pazara's battalion.

As for Pazara, the most reliable evidence out of Bosnia confirms that he served under al-Shishani and Ikanovic as the commander of a tank battalion, a rank that exceeds what most of the Islamic State's American fighters can achieve. In fact, Pazara went on to become one of the highest-ranking Americans ever in the Islamic State, at one point commanding as many as 50 to 60 men, according to Bosnian analyst Azinovic. Pazara's role was likely a testament to his Bosnian-jihadist connections with people like Ikanovic and Ganic, his previous military experience in the Bosnian War, and his knack for being in the right place at the right time as the sands of intra-jihadist competition shifted toward the ascent of ISIS.

Pazara's foreign-fighter contingent was known for its braggadocio on social media; Pazara was no exception. He kept a running diary of life in Syria on his Facebook page, posting pictures of his exploits and status updates about the strength of ISIS. The early photos depict a more romanticized view of combat, showing Pazara in recruitment-style pictures. Accompanying one image of him posing with a rifle, Pazara commented: “I pray to Allah that this picture can be used for *da'wah* [recruitment] ... May Allah give my brothers and sisters even more strength for this job, which leads us on the path to Paradise.”

Other images are more casual: Pazara at a Bosnian-style lamb roast in Syria. Several other Bosnian militants are present, including [Senad Hasanovic](#), who was arrested alongside Ikanovic in the mid-2000s for the Western embassy bomb plot. Another picture, from the fall of 2013, shows Pazara on a motorbike—mirroring a similar picture taken of him on a Kawasaki back in the United States before his radical conversion. The bike in the Syria picture is a cheap Chinese-made model. (Pazara's comment: "We don't spend much, praise be to Allah.")

But as Pazara continued to fight in Syria, his social-media presence took a darker turn. Pictures of Bosnians killed in combat, accompanied by tributes to their martyrdom, became increasingly frequent. In March 2014, according to the [indictment](#), he communicated with an unnamed individual in the United States; Pazara told him about a mission in which his battalion took control of a large area, killed 11 opposing soldiers, and captured one prisoner. Pazara stated that he intended to slaughter the prisoner the next day. A few weeks later, Ramiz Hodzic communicated with Rosic, claiming he saw a video of Pazara's group in action, potentially during the late-March operation Pazara described. Hodzic told Rosic that he saw "ours" (that is, Pazara's group) kill five soldiers, one of whom they beheaded. He allegedly used this example to encourage Rosic to donate money to buy "five good snipers," which Rosic allegedly did on April 15, 2014.

In May 2014, Pazara uploaded a photo album of dead combatants from the Kurdish militias, who are fighting for a state within Syria and who had been killed fighting Pazara's battalion. "These *kafirs* [nonbelievers] of the PKK [the Kurdistan Workers' Party] ... with Allah's help, were killed during the last military action fighting against the Islamic State," Pazara proclaimed online. "This is what is waiting for them in the world, these infidels in the trenches were killed one by one fleeing their homes." One of the dead fighters was wearing a Tommy Hilfiger T-shirt, and Pazara quipped that, despite their designer apparel, "they didn't have any footwear, Allahu Akbar."

Four months later, ISIS fighters began a month-long siege of the areas surrounding Kobani in the autonomous area of Rojava on the Turkish-Syrian border. They faced stiff resistance from a coalition led by Kurdish factions and Iraqi Peshmerga forces, along with elements of the Free Syrian Army.

On or around September 22, 2014, Pazara was killed in the battle in Kobani. He was 38 years old, according to *SAFFba*, an online newspaper with connections to the Bosnian Salafi movement. When he died, ISIS had not yet entered the city limits of Kobani, but it was slowly pushing back the counterforces on the outskirts of the city. Ultimately, ISIS failed to capture Kobani, because foreign powers initiated airstrikes to push back ISIS and protect the local Yazidi population from imminent destruction.

AZARA HAS BEEN dead for nearly three years, but the material-support cases involving the Bosnian-American network are ongoing. As the prosecution shows, the financing

of terrorist networks from the United States can occur through small, personal interactions established online and offline. At first, each of the six Americans charged pleaded not guilty to conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists. Ramiz Hodzic and Nihad Rosic were additionally charged with conspiracy to kill or maim persons in a foreign country. Jasminka Ramic eventually pled guilty to one count of the indictment (conspiracy to kill or maim persons in a foreign country) and was sentenced to three years in federal prison. The trials of the five other Bosnian defendants remain pending.

Each individual story of foreign fighters like Pazara has its own winding streams of evidence and backstories. One of the major difficulties inherent to studying the escalation from interest to radicalization to violence is attempting to find common denominators among the thousands of individuals who zealously commit themselves to an extreme cause. But the darkness behind Pazara's paper trail—a turbulent life, disappointment, grievances, the need for redemption, the ideological underpinnings—connects his story to those of other foreign fighters. Each is bound by those deeper shadows—even when each Westerner's path to radicalization contains its own idiosyncrasies—like the Mississippi college graduate who packed Starburst Minis for her trip to Syria or the French man who complained that his iPod didn't work there.

Or Abdullah Ramo Pazara, who after choosing a radical departure from American society still found it satisfying to drink instant hot cocoa in the Syrian desert.
