



Murat Muftari with a local Iraqi boy taken during a civil mission to give life support and supplies to families that had been run out of their homes or villages by radical Islamists. (Spring/Summer 2006).



Photo taken less than 30 minutes after the explosion, in which the house was destroyed. The 3rd floor was completely gone, as there was a fighting position there with rockets and ammo that cooked off and blew up when the fire started.



Murat Muftari, after the immediate completion of an overnight until morning mission going after foreign insurgents in a village in Baqouba, Iraq. (Spring 2006).



# "X" Factors in Defeating Radical Islam

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### The Iraq Experience of an Albanian-American Sufi Muslim in the U.S. Army Special Forces

By Murat Muftari



The post-9/11 world has brought many variables to the global chess game, changing the course of history. Before the atrocities of 9/11, radical Islam had an identifiable and widely-encountered face, but the Western public did not grasp who it included or what they wanted. It was a genuine "X" factor to most.

I fell into another "unknown" category, as a young Albanian-American Muslim, eager to learn about the real world. When the World Trade Center towers were hit on the morning of September 11, 2001, I was on my way to a class in American Government 101 as a freshman in college. So too would 9/11 change the course of my story.

Growing up with a thirst for the truth, experience, and excitement, I knew my calling had finally come. I suspended my college aspirations, looked into how to join the military, and drove to the nearest recruiting station. My research had guided me towards a new "18-X program" that the U.S. military created after 9/11. It allowed individuals to become Army Special Forces personnel if they could pass an intensive 24-month training program testing both the body and the mind. The program could put me on the frontlines of the global war on terror, with the most elite brothers to my left and right. And so began the main chapter in my journey of learning about the real world and finding out of what I was made.

Twenty-four months later, with a Green Beret on my head and a Special Forces tab on my shoulder, and after many restless nights, it was time to join the fight. After a hasty, two-week pre-mission training exercise, I would join my new Special Forces A-Team down-range in Iraq – "the sandbox." As we landed in Tikrit, Iraq, on the night of a Super Bowl Sunday, I knew the luxuries and comforts of home were half a world away. My wish to learn about the real world had quickly come true, in joining my team right in Saddam's backyard. It was the first of my three deployments to Iraq.

The end of 2004 and beginning of 2005 was a transitional period in the Iraq war; tactics had changed, suicide

bombings were the new norm in enemy action, and the influx of foreign fighters had seemingly increased. Although I was the rookie, and an Albanian-American Muslim, I gained the support of my experienced fellow-soldiers, by allowing my actions to speak louder than my words. We were near the center of Tikrit, in a team ten-strong with a guard force of Kurdish Peshmerga fighters helping to protect our compound. We were deployed in the heart of Tikrit, but not only to stay within the safety of our compound. We had goals to achieve.

For the most part, we went about our various operations with minor problems. But hostility toward our team and our compound was growing in Tikrit, as we began disrupting the financing and logistics cells of anti-Coalition Sunnis. As our duties continued, we were exposed to a more sophisticated and complex cell of insurgents committed to oppose our operations and, ultimately, our way of life. Surveillance and intelligence had led us to the local leader of the cell and my first encounter with the Tawhid al-Jihad network. This terrorist group was more extreme, better financed, and prepared to execute mass casualty suicide operations against U.S. forces and local inhabitants.

After repeated small arms attacks on our compound, my team leaders drafted an operation based on a day-time mission. We knew that conventional procedure would not work in the area, given the system of paid informants and observers the enemy had in place. So, with mission approval, in Special Forces style, dressed in traditional Iraqi garb, we conducted a day-time snatch-and-

grab action, targeting the local boss of Tawhid al-Jihad when he least expected it. The mission was a success. Our team's fight against Islamist extremists, however, had just begun.

The morning of April 14, 2005 is one that is stamped in my memory forever. At 6:55 a.m., I woke up to an earth-shaking thud, a fire ball racing through my bedroom, and the wall of bricks next to my bed collapsing on top of me. The extremists had just sent their wake-up call, in the form of a fuel-tanker suicide bomber, and I had just been introduced to authentic Wahhabism. Somehow, everyone on our side survived the explosion (one of the largest jihadist bombings in Iraq). The house we were occupying had been destroyed, but stood ready to be rebuilt. I, for my part, felt reenergized and motivated. I had just met my foe as an Albanian-American Muslim and as a Special Forces combatant, and for the first time I was truly exposed to the other face of Islam.

I had grown up as a Bektashi Sufi Muslim, in the vicinity of Baba Rexhebi's First Albanian-American Teqe in the U.S., in Taylor, Michigan. There I was taught a different Islam. The guidance of Baba Rexhebi concentrated on high character, love, knowledge, progress, reason, tolerance, and a shedding of the ego. With Wahhabi extremism in front of my face in Iraq, after learning such a different understanding of Islam through Baba Rexhebi in his Teqe, my path in this world was becoming clearer.

I realized there were several "X" factors in the war against the Wahhabi Islamists. One was the appearance of a new breed of Special Forces soldiers, through the 18-X program. The 18-X conception recruited well-disciplined, outside-the-box thinking, type-A individuals ready to get down and join the fight to free the oppressed. I have formed many solid friendships with Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds, through my three deployments to Iraq. These friends I made respect my background as an Albanian-American Muslim, and the similarities between the suffering that my people endured in the history of Albania and Kosovo, with the injustices imposed on Iraqis. They have become lasting relationships based on honor, mutual respect, and trust. The ultimate reward came recently when one of my Iraqi counterparts named his newborn son after me.

The second "X" factor deals with the position that pluralistic Islamic Sufism holds in my heart and the hearts of millions of believing Muslims throughout the world. Our Islam is one where love is the essential theme and the real reason of our existence. One that requires abandoning the ego, acquiring greater knowledge, and learning to fully grasp its truth. One that remains faithful to the path of truth by gaining respect for the absolute. One in which the idea and words written through our guides in symbolic beauty liberate our awareness for the greater good. One empowering freedom of thought to prosper and grow like a flower in perfect conditions. One where oppression cannot win because free thought is no longer containable.

We say to the misguided Wahhabis, who build their defense around an offensive system of despotism, that one sure path to the truth was found by some of the greatest Islamic mystics around the world. These are mystical guides that passed their message through scripture and singing, and knowledge and kindness are their weapons. Their weapons never malfunction, never run out of ammunition, and they do not have to wait for spring offensives. Their weapons spread and increase continuously in the information age and their ammunition of love does not miss.

## Engel slams "shameful" IOC over the refusal to honor the murdered Israeli athletes

Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY-17) slammed the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for continuing their refusal of a minute of silence to honor the 11 Israeli athletes murdered at the 1972 Munich Games by Palestinian terrorists. Rep. Engel is a senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and co-sponsor (with Rep. Nita Lowey) of H.Res 663, calling for the IOC to have a minute of silence at the London Games this week.

"Have the Palestinians become totally unmoored? In 2010, they honored Dalal Mughrabi, who, in 1978, massacred 38 Israeli civilians, including 13 children, by naming a square after her.

Now, they are objecting to a minute of silence to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the terrorist murders of 11 Israelis at the

1972 Munich Olympics? I ask them: What should the world understand from these sad and bizarre positions? Should we conclude that the Palestinian infatuation with terrorism has finally come to a close? Or, is it painfully clear that their love affair with the mass murders of civilians – even after all of these years of peace talks – is still not over? Unfortunately, I think the answer is obvious."

"I have said that if any other country had their athletes brutally murdered by terrorists on Olympic soil, the IOC would have had multiple minutes of silence over the years in subsequent games. I fear that the IOC won't memorialize the Munich 11 at the Opening Ceremonies in London because they were Israeli, and the IOC has bent over backwards to pander to the

Arab world. Now that the Palestinian Authority has officially thanked the IOC for their choice to ignore their murdered athletes, I think the IOC should be utterly ashamed of themselves. So much for the Olympic spirit."

Yesterday, Eliot Engel (D-Bronx), Reps. Steve Israel (D-Huntington), Richard Hanna (R-Barneveld) and Nita Lowey (D-Harrison) held a minute of silence to honor the victims of the 1972 Munich Massacre. They also called on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to reconsider its rejection of recent requests to hold a minute of silence during the opening ceremonies of this year's Olympic Games, which will take place tomorrow. 15 bipartisan Members of Congress participated in the minute of silence.

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