

## RUMSFELD'S KNOWN UNKNOWNNS

# The Graying of Terror(ism) and Dark Terror

**On February 12, 2002, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld gave one of his more memorable press briefings**

It was during this briefing, while standing beside Gen. Richard Myers, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that Rumsfeld pronounced the following: "...there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns - the ones we don't know we don't know. And if one looks throughout the history of our country and other free countries, it is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones [sic]."

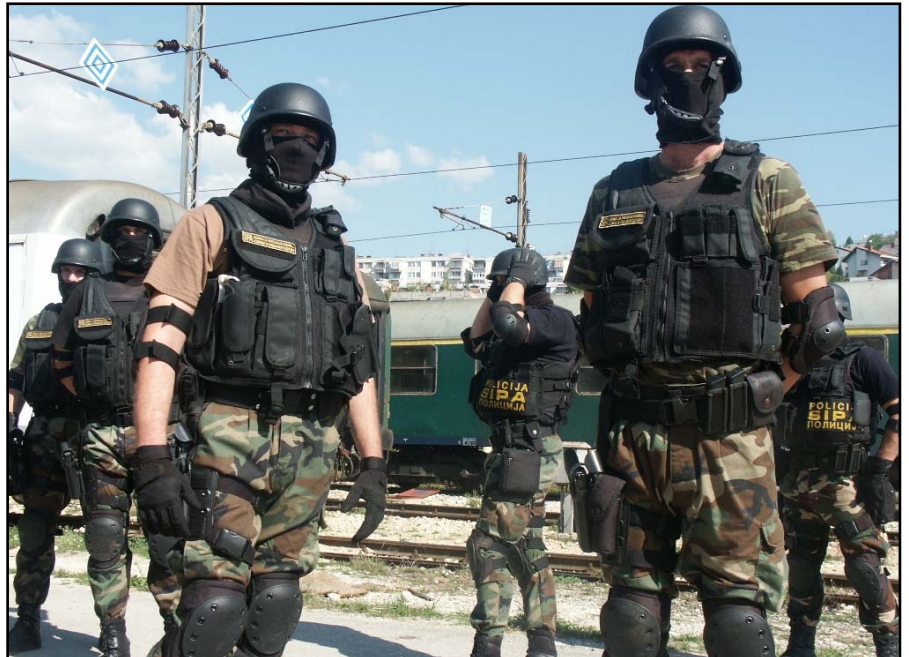
(The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek added a fourth category, the unknown known, which is what we intentionally refuse to acknowledge that we know.)

## Masked Men

Rumsfeld's remarks were in response to a reporter's follow up question about whether there was "any evidence to indicate that Iraq has attempted to or is willing to supply terrorists with weapons of mass destruction." I am not sure what Rumsfeld had in mind when he uttered these remarks, but at the time I found them to be quite amusing - an attempt to clarify a little and obfuscate even more the importance of evidence - and I have never forgotten them.

But now they have taken on new significance for me, confirming in my own mind the importance of evidence when it comes to facing terror and terrorism, an importance that has taken on added weight in recent months. Enter the unrest in Ukraine and the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines (MH) Flight 370, both of which should be of interest to Bosnians if for no other reason than these events have something to do with terror(ism) and Bosnians know this subject well.

Take Ukraine. From the time the Euromaidan protests began in November 2013 to



**By Rory J. Conces**  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

today, there have been gun-toting masked men walking the streets of Kiev, Donetsk and Luhansk. In more recent weeks, well-armed masked men known as "green men" have seized Ukrainian government properties in towns across eastern Ukraine. These masked men are known unknowns simply because their masks conceal their identities. There is a cloud of ambiguity: Are the known unknowns Russian soldiers, pro-Russian separatists, Ukraine ultranationalists, or members of some other group? Are they friend or foe? Will they become terrorists and, if so, whose terrorists? It is they who disturb the blackness and whiteness of the situation; it is they who make it gray. This is what I call the graying of terror (and, perhaps terrorism).

Terror is about instilling fear, and terrorism is, in part, the systematic instilling of fear. Men in black balaclava do just that; they make some people extremely fearful. Granted there are police units around the world, including some in Bosnia, who regularly wear masks, they do so to conceal their identities from evil. However, when bad guys wear masks, they do so to conceal their identities to do evil. But even here there is ambiguity because sometimes masked police officers do evil (for example, sniping protestors),

thereby further contributing to the graying of terror(ism).

## Road Blocks Again?

Bosnians are not without their own experiences with masked men. In the 90s these men came at all times of the day and night to murder, rape, and pillage. Their desire to inflict misery on another human being was insatiable. Neither ethnic identity nor age was a guarantee that a person would not be brutalized; if they were selected, then they went away. Times have changed. The masked men who are seen in Sarajevo and elsewhere in Bosnia are sometimes members of the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA) whose mission is to combat organized crime and terrorism, as well as protect people and property.

But will that be true tomorrow? The graying of terror(ism) in Ukraine has been associated with a pro-secessionist movement in the east of the country as well as a powerful neighbor that not only supports the secessionists but that has also annexed the Crimean Peninsula of Ukraine. Could pro-Serbian secessionists mask themselves and cloud the situation so that the dream of securing the sovereignty of the Republika Srpska is finally realized without going to war?

For quite some time, Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik has talked as though secession was in the wind. Now former High

Representative Paddy Ashdown has sounded the alarm following Dodik's meeting in Moscow with Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, who apparently has proposed offering a loan to the Serbs in lieu of them participating in an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan to Bosnia. Will Putin's overtures make Dodik even more emboldened toward secession? Will masked men once again set up road blocks throughout Bosnia? Will they have "POLICIJA" painted on their body armor? Perhaps the International Community will not allow the unthinkable graying of terror(ism) to return to Bosnia, nonetheless some Bosnians remain apprehensive, particularly in light of what has taken place in Ukraine.

Now let us turn to Malaysia Airlines Flight 370. MH370, a Boeing 777, vanished on March 8 with 239 people on board while it was en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. For whatever reason, MH370 veered off-course and is said to have ended its journey in the Southern Indian Ocean west of Australia. Experts have contended that someone made the mid-course correction. So the question is, "Was the vanishing of MH370



*Woman looks at remains of her family members, found in Tomasica mass grave, in Sejkovaca identification center*

simply an accident, due to negligence, or the result of a terrorist act?"

Many suspect a terrorist act. But if we take terrorism as an act (or threat) of violence against noncombatants, and the act has the objective of exacting revenge, intimidation, or in some way influencing a wider audience, then the fact that MH370 is a known unknown of the most extreme kind may place it in a rather different category from that of terrorism - what I call dark terror, a terror that is intentionally concealed instead of publicized.

It is principally because there is an evidentiary deficit that this known unknown does not fit well with the aforementioned defini-

tion of terrorism. It is not clear that it was an act of violence, let alone an act of violence intended to exact revenge, intimate, or influence an audience in some other way. In fact, no one has claimed responsibility for the tragedy. Granted, many suicide bombings are not followed by a "declaration of ownership." But whereas the explosion in a market place is public, including an evidence trail and witnesses galore, dark terror is dark because there is very little, if any, publicity, evidence, or witnesses. In the case of MH370, investigators are struggling to find evidence of the plane, let alone of a crime.

### An Evidentiary Deficit

This brings us back to the genocide in Bosnia. Thousands of people remain missing and presumed murdered. They are the known unknown Bosnians of that conflict. And when the perpetrators of the genocide thought their work would be uncovered, that the charms of bone and bits of clothing would be discovered and used by forensic anthropologists to build a case against them, they decided to dig up the evidence and dis-

pose of it the best way they could, by placing remains in secondary grave sites. Their intent was to create an evidentiary deficit, for the evidence to "disappear" like MH370. The murderers wanted their victims to remain known unknowns. So much so that not even the survivors had the opportunity to pull a scarf around their nose to reduce the stench as they walked through an identification center in search of family members. And whereas the digging up of remains around Srebrenica

and reburying them in secret grave sites is similar to the case of MH370 insofar as the disappearance of evidence is concerned, the two cases are different. The context of Srebrenica was obvious - a case of war time genocide, so we knew what to expect and how to proceed. In the case of MH370, as a case of dark terror, the context has yet to be set, including whether a crime has been committed. That is why it seems more appropriate to speak of dark terror rather than dark terrorism. Srebrenica was never dark terror. Nor was it gray terror(ism). It was terrorism in the guise of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and rape.

Rumsfeld unknowingly provided a conceptual tool in the known unknown, one that has been instructive in highlighting the connection between evidence and terrorism. Combating terrorism of whatever kind requires a whole range of evidence, uncovering the identities of the terrorists is just part of what is required. It has also helped to become aware of the graying of terror(ism). But perhaps its most important contribution is to begin the conversation about dark terror.

Some may contend that dark terror is less frightening than terrorism. This may not be far off the mark, given that there is an affective delay of the fear not being fully unleashed without evidence that points to a violent act that has a particular objective. Then, again, it may miss the mark completely. Ask yourself the following questions: How could this form of terror be combated when it rests on the absence of that which is required to combat it? What if the vanishing act was intentional, that the plane was crashed in an area of the Indian Ocean that is far removed from sea lanes, prone to severe weather, and is very deep making it extremely difficult to find the plane let alone retrieve the wreckage? What if there are lone wolves or organizations built around dark terror? (What if states are exemplars of dark terror?) This would be an entirely different problem to contend with, one that would require a rethinking of terrorism. No wonder governments are searching at great cost for the wreckage and the flight recorders. It is easier to wrap our heads around terrorism than it is dark terror.

### Like Russian Roulette

No doubt we want the known unknowns of the Ukraine crisis and the genocide of Srebrenica to be turned into known knowns. Some progress has been made in both cases: photographic studies of the green men may have identified some individuals as members of Russian military and intelligence units and more remains are being found and identified in the Srebrenica area though identified victims grossly outnumber the identified perpetrators. But dealing with the possibility of dark terror cannot be any less urgent. We surely want an evidence trail that closes the case on MH370 as either an accident or an episode of terrorism. If MH370 is left unsolved, then everyday life may become even more like playing Russian roulette. None of us will know if and when we will be the victim of dark terror.