

Malaysia Airlines MH17 Whodunnit Still a Mystery

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

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Beyond confirming that Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 apparently was shot down on July 17, the Dutch Safety Board's interim investigative report answered few questions, including some that would seem easy to address, such as the Russian military radar purporting to show a Ukrainian SU-25 jetfighter in the area, a claim that the Kiev government denied.

Either the Russian radar showed the presence of a jetfighter “gaining height” as it closed to within three to five kilometers of the passenger plane – as [the Russians claimed](#) in a July 21 press conference – or it didn't. The Kiev authorities insisted that they had no military aircraft in the area at the time.

But [the 34-page Dutch report](#) is silent on the jetfighter question, although noting that the investigators had received Air Traffic Control “surveillance data from the Russian Federation.”

The report is also silent on the “dog-not-barking” issue of whether the U.S. government had satellite surveillance that revealed exactly where the supposed ground-to-air missile was launched and who may have fired it.

The Obama administration has asserted knowledge about those facts – initially pointing the finger at ethnic Russian rebels using a powerful Buk anti-aircraft missile system supposedly supplied by Russia – but the U.S. government has withheld satellite photos and other intelligence information that could presumably corroborate the charge.



Image: A Malaysia Airways' Boeing 777 like the one that crashed in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014. (Photo credit: Aero Icarus from Zürich, Switzerland)

Curiously, too, the Dutch report, released on Tuesday, states that the investigation received “satellite imagery taken in the days after the occurrence.” Obviously, the more relevant images in assessing blame would be aerial photography in the days and hours before the

crash that killed 298 people on the flight from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur.

In mid-July, eastern Ukraine was a high priority for U.S. intelligence and a Buk missile battery is a large system that should have been easily picked up by U.S. aerial reconnaissance. The four missiles in a battery are each about 16-feet-long and would have to be hauled around by a truck and then put in position to fire.

Just days after the July 17 shoot-down, a source who was briefed by U.S. intelligence analysts [told me](#) that the analysts were examining satellite imagery that showed the crew manning the suspected missile battery wearing what looked like Ukrainian army uniforms.

Then, on July 22, at a briefing given to journalists from major U.S. publications, a U.S. intelligence official suggested that a Ukrainian military “defector” might have launched the Buk missile against the airliner, possibly explaining the issue of the uniforms.

The Los Angeles Times [reported](#) that “U.S. intelligence agencies have so far been unable to determine the nationalities or identities of the crew that launched the missile. U.S. officials said it was possible the SA-11 [Buk anti-aircraft missile] was launched by a defector from the Ukrainian military who was trained to use similar missile systems.”

The briefers also theorized that the rebels hit Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 by mistake, thinking it was a Ukrainian military aircraft.

Yet, while the U.S. government has released a variety of satellite photos to bolster various allegations lodged against ethnic Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine and the Russian government, the Obama administration has balked at providing satellite imagery relating to the Flight 17 case, instead basing much of its public case on “social media.”

Russian Satellite Images

The Dutch report’s reference to only post-crash satellite photos is also curious because the Russian military released a number of satellite images purporting to show Ukrainian government Buk missile systems north of the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk before the attack, including two batteries that purportedly were shifted 50 kilometers south of Donetsk on July 17, the day of the crash, and then removed by July 18.

Russian Lt. Gen. Andrey Kartoplov called on the Ukrainian government to explain the movements of its Buk systems and why Kiev’s Kupol-M19S18 radars, which coordinate the flight of Buk missiles, showed increased activity leading up to the July 17 shoot-down.

The Ukrainian government countered these questions by asserting that it had “evidence that the missile which struck the plane was fired by terrorists, who received arms and specialists from the Russian Federation,” according to Andrey Lysenko, spokesman for Ukraine’s Security Council, using Kiev’s preferred term for the rebels.

Lysenko added: “To disown this tragedy, [Russian officials] are drawing a lot of pictures and maps. We will explore any photos and other plans produced by the Russian side.” But Ukrainian authorities have failed to address the Russian evidence except through broad denials.

On July 29, amid escalating rhetoric against Russia from U.S. government officials and the

Western news media, the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity [called](#) on President Barack Obama to release what evidence the U.S. government had on the shoot-down, including satellite imagery.

“As intelligence professionals we are embarrassed by the unprofessional use of partial intelligence information,” the group wrote. “As Americans, we find ourselves hoping that, if you indeed have more conclusive evidence, you will find a way to make it public without further delay. In charging Russia with being directly or indirectly responsible, Secretary of State John Kerry has been particularly definitive. Not so the evidence. His statements seem premature and bear earmarks of an attempt to ‘poison the jury pool.’”

However, the Obama administration failed to make public any intelligence information that would back up its earlier suppositions.

Then, in early August, [I was told](#) that some U.S. intelligence analysts had shifted away from the original scenario blaming the rebels and Russia to one focused more on the possibility that extremist elements of the Ukrainian government were responsible. But then chatter about U.S. intelligence information on the shoot-down faded away.

Given the intense global interest in the tragedy, there were high hopes that the Dutch Safety Board, which is heading up the international investigation, would at least begin clarifying the evidence and sifting through the conflicting claims. However, more than seven weeks after the crash, the preliminary report fails to address any of the evidence regarding who actually fired the missile and from precisely what location.

The Dutch Safety Board promised a final report before the first anniversary of the crash on July 17, 2015. By then, however, the slaughter of those 298 people could well become a cold case with little hope of finding the perpetrators – whoever they might be – and bringing them to justice.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, America’s Stolen Narrative, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes America’s Stolen Narrative. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

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