

“The Russians are Responsible for this Strike”: US Admits It Has “No Idea” Who Attacked Aleppo UN Humanitarian Convoy

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Global Research, September 26, 2016
[The Duran](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#), [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#)
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As top US officials admit they do not know who attacked the Aleppo relief convoy all prospects of an impartial investigation fade away.

One of the overlooked comments US General Dunford, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made at the Senate hearing on Thursday, concerned the recent attack on the relief convoy near Aleppo, which has recently been so much in the news.

[Here is what he said](#)

“I don’t have the facts. There is no doubt in my mind that the Russians are responsible.”

(bold italics added)

And here is what US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter [said](#), testifying at the same Senate hearing alongside General Dunford

“The Russians are responsible for this strike whether they conducted it or not.”

(bold italics added)

In other words, despite the tidal wave of claims which have been flowing saying the Russians attacked the convoy, and despite the claims to that effect made by the anonymous US officials who have been prowling behind the scenes through the Western media, the US does not actually know that the Russians attacked the convoy. US General Dunford “doesn’t have the facts” and US Defence Secretary Carter cannot say whether the Russians “conducted (the attack) or not”

I presume Dunford and Carter, respectively the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the US Secretary of Defence, are the sort of people who would know if US intelligence was reporting that the Russians carried out the attack. I can see no reason why they would fail to say that the Russians carried out the attack if that is what US intelligence was actually reporting. The fact that they are saying that they don’t know must mean that US intelligence – and therefore the US government – doesn’t know either.

Basically what the US is saying is: we know it wasn't us; it could only therefore have been the Syrians or the Russians; only the Russians have the necessary technology and two of their SU24s were in the area; therefore it must have been the Russians.

This is not knowledge or evidence but a chain of inference.

To confuse matters, judging by [a piece by the Moon of Alabama](#), the US story appears to have shifted so that the US is now apparently claiming that *both* the Syrians *and* the Russians jointly carried out the attack.

It is sometimes possible to infer the truth of who was behind a particular attack by looking at the evidence, but can it actually be done in this case? The short answer I would say is no.

Since the attack is being called by some a war crime, it would seem a basic step first to secure and inspect what in that case would be a crime scene before drawing any inferences and making any accusations. Almost a week after the attack not only has that not been done, but no one seems to be in any hurry to do it.

With the crime scene not secured, the possibility of contamination or outright manipulation of the evidence is very real, especially given the strong incentive to do so of the Jihadi fighters who are in physical control of it. After all that is what many claim the Jihadi fighters did to the scene of the chemical attack on Ghouta in August 2013.

In light of this [photographs which have been circulating](#), which supposedly show the fin of a Russian bomb at the scene of the attack, can carry no weight, and must be disregarded, especially as the bomb in question appears to be one of the most commonly used in Syria, which would make finding and planting a sample of one at the scene of the attack a relatively straightforward matter.

In the absence of any actual evidence that the Russians carried out the attack, the US and the Western media have fallen back on ridiculing what the Russians have said about it. Unfortunately the clever way this has been done - notably by [US Secretary of State Kerry at the UN Security Council](#) - has confused many people, including someone as level headed as the veteran British correspondent [Patrick Cockburn](#).

Briefly, and contrary to the impression given by Kerry and others, the Russians have not said how the convoy was attacked or by whom or how it came to be destroyed. They have merely denied that they or the Syrians did it, and have provided commentaries on what they say is some of the evidence they have or which they have seen.

That evidence includes a [video](#) which they say shows armed Jihadis shadowing the convoy in a vehicle equipped with a mortar, information that [a US Predator drone was in the area](#), and analysis of video evidence of opposition activists [which they suggest shows that the convoy was set on fire](#), and was not destroyed as the result of an air strike.

The Russian claims about armed Jihadis near the convoy and the US Predator drone in the area do not look to me like claims that the convoy was attacked because it was being used as cover by the Jihadis, or that the Jihadis blew up the convoy with a mortar, or that the US Predator drone attacked it - all claims I have seen alleged that the Russians have made. The Russians have never made those claims, though others have done so on the strength of the commentary and evidence the Russians have provided.

Rather these Russian claims seem to me intended to counter US claims that the Russians “must have” attacked the convoy because two of their SU24s were in the area. The point the Russians are making is that if their SU24s were in the area, then so were the Jihadis and the US (in the form of the Predator drone), and to construe that it “must have been” the Russians who attacked the convoy merely because their SU24s happened to be in the area is therefore unwarranted.

As for the analysis of the video evidence that the convoy was set on fire, as the Russians have [themselves admitted](#), that is purely speculative. Without a proper inspection of the scene of the convoy attack one simply cannot know.

In my experience the invariable response of someone trying to cover up their involvement in a crime is to hit on a single made-up story of how the crime was committed, and to stick to it whilst providing an alibi. That that is not what the Russians are doing does not prove them innocent, but it is definitely not the sign of guilt some are taking it for. If anything it suggests that the Russians genuinely do not know what happened to the convoy, which might be why they are calling for the attack on the convoy to be independently investigated.

All other things being equal, the fact the Russians are calling for an independent investigation also suggests that they are unlikely to have done it. As a general rule someone who has committed a crime is usually the last person to call for an independent investigation of the crime, especially if the crime scene is not in their control. If the Russians did attack the convoy – or if the Syrians attacked the convoy and the Russians know the Syrians attacked it – then the Russian demand for an investigation looks like a frankly reckless double-bluff.

Again none of this proves that the Russians are innocent. Moreover anyone who wants to dispute the commentary or the evidence the Russians have put forward is at liberty to do so, though they do their credibility no favours if they do so by resorting to sarcasm and ridicule. However it is interesting that so far it is the Russians who are calling for an investigation whilst none of those who are accusing them is doing so.

In the meantime I do not think it is worthwhile speculating on how the convoy was destroyed or by whom. I do not think anywhere near enough facts are known to make it possible for anyone to say. In the absence of a proper investigation – or even an inspection of the site of the attack – any claim can be no more than a guess. If people like Dunford and Carter don’t have the necessary facts then it is impossible that anyone else commenting on what happened from afar can have either.

Sadly I must also say that I do not think that how the convoy came to be attacked or by whom will ever be known. Quite simply those who are in a position to find out the truth are not interested in doing so.

For the US the attack on the convoy came at a very convenient moment, when it was on the defensive following its attack on the Syrian troops defending Deir Ezzor. Whilst that does not mean it was the US which attacked the convoy or which ordered the attack on the convoy – for the record, I don’t think the US did either of those things – it does mean that the US has no incentive to find out the truth of what happened in case that might undermine a story that has served it so well.

With the US’s proxies in control of the scene of the attack that all but guarantees that no

proper investigation of this incident will ever take place, which in turn means that the truth of what happened will never become known.

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