

# Ukrainian parliament approves deployment of foreign armed forces to crash site

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After four days of failed attempts, a contingent of Dutch and Australian crash investigators and forensics experts, along with monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), reached the crash site of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 in east Ukraine.

The investigative team arrived at the crash site on Thursday via a rebel checkpoint, taking a route which had been recaptured by Ukrainian military forces over the last few days. The international investigative team has been tasked with recovering the estimated 80 remaining bodies of passengers, as well as collecting evidence from the wreckage of the Boeing 777 to determine what brought MH17 down.

The Dutch and Australian investigative team's efforts to reach the crash site had been stymied by intense fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists in the towns surrounding the debris field. Despite a July 21 UN resolution that called for a cessation of military activities in the area to allow for an international investigation, the US-backed Ukrainian government and its armed forces blocked access to the crash while launching an offensive to take control of the rebel-held territory surrounding the crash site.

The investigative team is serving as an expeditionary force for up to 950 armed men from Australia and the Netherlands, amid continued fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists. The Ukrainian parliament approved a provocative plan on Thursday for the deployment of 250 Australians and 700 from the Netherlands, ostensibly to guard the crash site.

The agreement allows for the deployment of foreign non-military as well as military personnel who will be authorized to use their weapons in self-defense. Australian and Dutch armed forces will be free to move

about in areas related to the crash investigation and will have to get permission from the Ukrainian government if they want to move outside these areas.

A team of 68 Malaysian police personnel arrived in Kiev on Thursday to assist the Australian and Dutch forces in their mission to take control of the crash site. Russian aviation authorities dispatched an investigative team to Kiev on Thursday in the hope that they will also be able to participate in the crash investigation.

Also on Thursday, an extraordinary session in Kiev, the Ukrainian parliament voted under pressure from President Petro Poroshenko to reject Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk's resignation, impose a war tax to keep funds flowing to the military campaign in the east, increase military funding, and enact economic reforms necessary to obtaining bailout funds from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The vote in parliament was 16 for and 109 against Yatsenyuk's resignation, with 335 abstentions. In another vote of confidence for Yatsenyuk, the parliament voted to continue a \$17 billion IMF bailout for the Ukrainian economy, conditioned on billions of dollars in cuts to fuel subsidies, social programs, and public sector wages. "I said I won't go down without a fight and I did it, Ukraine didn't default and will never default," Yatsenyuk said in response to the vote.

The Ukrainian parliament also approved a 1.5 percent war tax on income which is expected to raise 2.9 billion hryvnias (\$213 million) by January 1, 2015. Poroshenko told the parliament that the Ukrainian government is spending 70 million hryvnias (\$5.8 million) per day on military operations in the Donbass region.

After the approval of the war tax, Yatsenyuk announced a new 9 billion hryvnia (\$744 million) increase in defense spending to purchase weaponry and

pay the salaries of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, National Guard, and others fighting the pro-Russian separatist forces.

The new funding for military operations compares to a fund of a paltry 2 billion hryvnias (\$165 million) announced at the same time for the rebuilding of the Donbass region, which has been devastated by Ukrainian military operations against the pro-Russian rebels.

Despite the announcement of a “day of quiet” by the Ukrainian government to facilitate access to the MH17 crash site, fighting continued around the crash site and throughout rebel-held territory. The Donetsk City Council reported that there was fighting near the village of Zhovtneve. An AP correspondent reported a mortar attack near Hrabove, the city where much of the debris from MH17 landed.

Fighting around the city of Luhansk downed strategic power lines, completely cutting off power to the city of over 400,000 inhabitants. Pumps which provide residents with water have stopped working, and hospitals are running on generators with dangerously low fuel reserves.

US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, in an interview with Voice of America on July 29 declared that he was impressed by the successes of the Kiev regime’s “anti-terrorist” operations in the east. Pyatt lamented that the situation in the east was becoming a “humanitarian disaster,” blaming Russian intervention in the east.

According to UN estimates, US- and European-backed military operations in eastern Ukraine have resulted in more than 1,100 civilian deaths and another 3,400 injured since mid-April. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov indicated on Wednesday that Russia will appeal for the deployment of a humanitarian mission in east Ukraine at the United Nations, OSCE, and Red Cross.



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